THE PREACHER:

OR

SKETCHES OF ORIGINAL SERMONS,

CHIEFLY SELECTED FROM THE MANUSCRIPTS

OF

TWO EMINENT DIVINES OF THE LAST CENTURY,

FOR THE USE OF LAY PREACHERS AND YOUNG MINISTERS.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED

A LETTER TO A YOUNG MINISTER,

ON PREACHING THE GOSPEL.

FROM THE SECOND LONDON EDITION.

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SKETCHES OF SERMONS ON THE FOLLOWING SUBJECTS:

THE GOSPEL, THE PROPER SUBJECT

OF

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY:

IN A LETTER ADDRESSED TO A YOUNG MINISTER.

MY DEAR BROTHER,

Though expounding the Scriptures be an important part of the public work of a minister, yet it is not the whole of it. There is a great variety of subjects, both in doctrinal and practical religion, which require to be illustrated, established, and improved; which cannot be done in an exposition. Discourses of this kind are properly called Sermons.

You request me to give you my thoughts on that part of your work, somewhat more particularly. I will endeavour to do so, by considering what must be the *matter* and the *manner* of preaching, if we wish to do good to the souls of men.

Unless the subject matter of your preaching be truly evangelical, you had better be any thing than a minister. When the apostle speaks of a necessity being laid upon him to preach the gospel, he might mean that he was not at liberty to relinquish his work in favour of ease, or honour, or any other worldly object; yet he was not bound to preach merely, but to preach that doctrine which had been delivered unto him. The same may be said of us: woe unto us, if we preach not the gospel.

It may seem to be a very easy thing, with the Bible in our hands, to learn the truth, clear of all impure mixtures, and to make it the subject of our ministry. But it is not so. We talk much of thinking and judging for ourselves; but who can justly pretend to be free from the influences which surround him, especially in early life. We are insensibly, and almost irresistibly assimilated by the books we read, and the company with which we associate; and the principles current in our age and connections, will ordinarily influence our minds. Nor is the danger solely from without: we are "slow of heart" to believe in a doctrine so holy and divine, and prone to deviate at the very point. If therefore we were wholly to think for ourselves, that were no security for our keeping to the mind of Christ.

I mention these things, not to deter you from either reading or thinking for yourself, but rather to inculcate the necessity of prayer for divine guidance, and a close adherence to the Scriptures. Though we must think for ourselves, we must not depend upon ourselves, but as little children, learn at the feet of our Saviour.

If you look over the New Testament, you will find the subject matter

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of your preaching briefly, yet fully expressed, in such language as the following. "Preach THE WORD—preach THE GOSPEL—preach the gospel to every creature—Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that REPENTANCE AND REMISSION OF SINS should be preached in his name, among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem—I declare unto you THE GOSPEL which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures: and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures—We preach CHRIST CRUCIFIED—I determined not to know any thing among you, save JESUS CHRIST, and HIM CRUCIFIED—This is THE RECORD, that God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son—We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him—I have kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, REPENTANCE TOWARDS GOD, AND FAITH TOWARDS OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST."

Such, my brother, is the concurrent language of the New Testament. Every one of the foregoing passages contains an epitome of the gospel ministry. You will not expect me to expatiate upon their various connections: I may however notice three or four particulars deducible from them.

I. In every sermon we should have an errand, and one of such importance, that if it be received or complied with it will issue in eternal salvation.

I say nothing of those preachers who profess to go into the pulpit without an errand, and to depend upon the Holy Spirit to furnish them with one at the time. I write not for them, but for such as make a point of thinking before they attempt to preach. Even of these I have heard some who in studying their texts, have appeared to me to have no other object in view, than to find something to say in order to fill up the time. This however is not preaching, but merely talking about good things. Such ministers, though they think of something beforehand, yet appear to me to resemble Ahimaaz, who ran without tidings. I have also heard many an ingenious discourse, in which I could not but admire the talents of the preacher; but his only object appeared to be to correct the grosser vices, and to form the manners of his audience, so as to render them useful members of civil society. Such ministers have an errand, but not of such importance as to save those who receive it which sufficiently proves that it is not THE GOSPEL.

In preparing for the pulpit, it would be well to reflect in some such manner as this. 'I am expected to preach, it may be to some hundreds of people, some of whom may come several miles to hear: and what

have I to say to them? Is it for me to sit here studying a text, merely to find something to say to fill up the hour? I may do this without imparting any useful instruction, without commending myself to any man's conscience, and without winning, or even aiming to win, one soul to Christ. It is possible there may be in the audience a poor miserable creature, labouring under the load of a guilty conscience. If he depart without being told how to obtain rest for his soul, what may be the consequence? Or, it may be, some stranger may be there, who has never heard the way of salvation in his life. If he should depart without hearing it now, and should die before another opportunity occurs, how shall I meet him at the bar of God? Possibly, some one of my constant hearers may die in the following week: and is there nothing I should wish to say to him before his departure? It may be that I myself may die before another Lord's day: this may be the last time that I shall ascend the pulpit: and have I no important testimony to leave with the people of my care?'

II. Every sermon should contain a portion of the doctrine of salvation by the death of Christ.

If there be any meaning in the foregoing passages, this is emphatically called THE GOSPEL. A sermon therefore, in which this doctrine has not a place, and I might add a prominent place, cannot be *a gospel sermon.* It may be ingenious, it may be eloquent; but a want of the doctrine of the cross, is a defect which no pulpit excellence can supply.

Far be it from me to encourage that fastidious humour manifested by some hearers, who object to a sermon unless the cross of Christ be the immediate and direct topic of discourse. There is a rich variety in the sacred writings, and so there ought to be in our ministrations. There are various important truths *supposed* by this great doctrine, and these require to be illustrated and established. There are various *branches* pertaining to it, which require to be distinctly considered; various *consequences* arising from it, which require to be pointed out; various *duties* corresponding with it, which require to be inculcated; and various *evils* inimical to it, which may require to be exposed.

All I mean to say is, that as there is a *relation* between these subjects and the doctrine of the cross, if we would introduce them in a truly evangelical manner, it must be *in that relation.* I may establish the moral character and government of God; the holiness, justice, goodness, and perpetual obligation of the law; the evil of sin, and the exposedness of the sinner to endless punishment. But if I have any other end in view than, by convincing him of his lost condition, to make him feel the need of a Saviour, I cannot be said to have preached THE GOSPEL; nor is my reasoning, however forcible, likely to produce any good effect. I may be very pointed, in pressing the practical parts of religion, and in reproving the sins of the times; but if I enforce the one, or inveigh against the other, on any other than evangelical principles, I, in so doing, preach not THE GOSPEL. All scriptural preaching is practical: but when practice is enforced in opposition to doctrine, or even to the neglect of it, it becomes unscriptural. The apostolic pre-

cept runs thus; "Preach the word; be instant in season, and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering AND DOCTRINE."

III. In preaching the gospel, we must not intimate the Orator, whose attention is taken up with his performance; but rather the Herald, whose object is to publish or proclaim good tidings.

There is in the one an earnestness, a fulness of heart, a mind so interested in the subject, as to be inattentive to other things, which is not in the other. "We believe, and therefore speak." The emphatical meaning of the terms *κηρυσσω*, *ευαγγελιζω*, to preach, and preach the gospel, is noticeable in the account given of the ministry of John the Baptist. "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is PREACHED, and every man presseth into it." Moses and the prophets spoke of things at a distance: but John did more than prophecy; his was the voice of one that CRIED. He announced the fulfilment of what had been foretold, proclaiming the Messiah as being "among them," and his kingdom as "at hand." He opened the door of salvation, and great numbers pressed in.

IV. Though the doctrine of Reconciliation by the blood of Christ forms the groundwork of the gospel embassy, yet it belongs to the work of the ministry, not merely to declare that truth, but to accompany it with earnest calls, and pressing invitations to sinners to receive it, together with the most solemn warnings and threatenings to unbelievers who continue to reject it.

The preaching of both John and Christ is indeed distinguished from the calls to repentance and faith, which they addressed to their hearers, as being the ground on which they rested; but the latter were no less essential to their work than the former. John came "preaching" in the wilderness of Judea, "and saying," Repent ye. After John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, "preaching" the gospel of the kingdom of God, "and saying," The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand—repent ye, and believe the gospel. And thus the apostles explain the ministry of reconciliation, as comprehending not only a declaration of the doctrine but the persuading of men, "beseeching them to be reconciled to God."

There is nothing in all this which clashes with the most entire dependence on the influence of the Holy Spirit, to give success to our ministry. Though we invite men, yet it is not on their pliability that we must rest our hopes, but on the power and promise of God. These are parts of the weapons of our warfare; but it is through God that they become mighty to the pulling down of strong holds.

SKETCHES OF SERMONS.

THE APOSTOLIC MINISTRY.

Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.—Colossians i. 28.

It is one of the peculiar characteristics of the Messiah's reign, that under it the poor should have the gospel preached to them. The truth was taught in various ways before, but from hence a multitude of heralds should be sent forth to proclaim the good news of salvation. The model of this practice is to be looked for in the New Testament; and in the text we see that there were three things especially pertaining to the Apostolic ministry.

1. The leading theme of it was Christ: "Whom we preach."

Preaching Christ, and the cross of Christ, is emphatically called 'the gospel,' 1 Cor. xv. 2—3; and 'the record which God hath given of his Son.' 1 John v. 11. The hearers of this gospel wanted something else: 'the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified.' 1 Cor. i. 22, 23.

In justification of this practice, let us consider some of the cases to which the subject will apply—

1. There may be some who have lately been brought to a sense of *their sin and danger*, and may be come with some such question as that which filled the heart of the Philippian jailer. We preach Christ as the only hope, the only refuge of the lost.

2. Another may feel unhappy because he cannot perceive *how God can forgive sin*, consistently with justice and faithfulness. The cross of Christ is the only solution of this difficulty, the only place where God and the sinner can meet and be reconciled.

3. Another having long been under conviction, is now *reformed:* he reads, and hears, and prays; but can find *no rest to his soul.* Christ only is the way, and he only can give him rest. Jer. vi. 16. Matt. xi. 28.

4. Some are full of *doubts and fears*, and want to obtain an interest in the promise of eternal life. We preach Christ: and if this be nothing to you, you will find nothing else to do you any real good. But if the way of salvation by him is welcome to your soul, you may dismiss your fears, for all is yours.

5. Another is bowed down under *the ills and burdens of life*, and is ready to despond and say, I shall never see good. Look to Jesus, lest ye be weary and faint in your minds; consider his sorrows, and forget your own. Heb. xii. 2, 3.

6. Another is *hungering for the bread of life*, and longing to be edified and comforted. The same doctrine which at first relieved us, will afterwards do to live upon, and nothing but Christ and him crucified will do us any real good. John vi. 57, 58.

7. It may be that some are *thoughtless and careless* under the word, still in a state of impenitence and unbelief. But whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, we must still go on preaching Christ and him crucified. This only is the power of God unto salvation, and this it is that furnishes motives both for repentance and faith. Isai. xlvi. 12, 13. Acts iv. 12. Rom. i. 16.

8. Some are *righteous in their own eyes*, are full, and have need of nothing; and know not that they are poor, and wretched, and blind, and naked. And what can destroy these vain hopes, and lay the sinner in the dust, but the exhibition of an able and alsufficient Saviour, and of mercy free and undeserved. Isai. lv. 1. 2 Rev. iii. 17, 18.

II. The practical manner in which the apostles preached this important doctrine: "warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom."

Warning and teaching is in some respect distinct from preaching the gospel, which properly speaking consists in proclaiming the good news of salvation; yet it is a necessary appendage to it, and essential to the christian ministry. Some men, under a pretence of preaching the gospel, have neglected it, and some have denounced it as legal; but it ought to suffice for us that the apostles, in preaching Christ, "warned every man, and taught every man in all wisdom."

1. They *warned every man*. Warning is an expression of kind regard: 'as my beloved sons,' says Paul to the Galatians, 'I warn you.' Those for whom we have no regard, we generally let alone, and suffer them to have their own way. Now the Scriptures make use of warning in many cases, and we are required to do the same—(1) Where persons are in *a wrong road*, love will apprise them of it, and warn them of the danger. Ezek. xxxiii. 8.—(2) Where they are in a condition which exposes them to *ruin*, love will warn them to make their escape and to flee from the wrath to come. Matt. iii. 7.—(3) Where men enjoy privileges and advantages which they have no heart to improve, they ought to be warned of the consequences, and exhorted to immediate repentance. Acts xiii. 41. These warnings are no other than the dictates of common prudence and benevolence, and can never be excluded from any thing like a rational exercise of the christian ministry.

2. The apostles *taught every man* in all wisdom, instructing them in the first principles of the oracles of God, giving them right views of their own character and condition as sinners, and showing to them the

suitableness and ability of Christ as a Saviour. Such also must be our labour, both in the pulpit and out of it, showing unto men the way of salvation. They are to be taught the evils they are to shun, and the good they are to choose: and this in order to their being brought to Christ, as the last and only refuge of the miserable and undone.

III. The end which the apostles had in view in the exercise of their ministry, and that is the salvation of their hearers, or "that they might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

They did not content themselves with forming the manners of their hearers nor merely with warning and teaching them: if not brought savingly to believe in Christ, they reckoned nothing to be done to any purpose. Gal. iv. 19.

But how was Paul to present "every man perfect in Christ Jesus?" Did he hope to save all that heard him? Viewing them *collectively* he did not, for he knew that only a remnant would be saved. Acts xv. 14. Rom. xi. 14. But considering them *individually* he hoped for every man, and laboured for their salvation.

God is not obliged to do all he is able to do to save sinners, though we are; and not knowing his counsel or design, it is for us to do our utmost, and leave the event to him. John xx. 30, 31. Rom. ix. 1—3. xi. 14.

We learn from hence, that the employment of Christ's faithful servants is to win souls to him, and it shall be their honour in the last day to present to him the fruits of their ministry. 2 Cor. xi. 2.

If this end be not answered, nothing is effected, and we shall lose our reward. A barren ministry is one of the greatest evils to be dreaded upon earth, and its consequences will be tremendous in the world to come. Ezek. xxxiv. 10. Zech. xi. 17. Matt. xxv. 30.

PLEADING WITH GOD UNDER AFFLICTION.

I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me.—Job. x. 2.

This language is full of overwhelming grief, of grief so insupportable as to make the sufferer 'weary of his life.' He resolves therefore to turn from all creatures, and address himself to God only. That we may enter more fully into the import of this language, let us observe the following things—

(1) That Job's friends who came to comfort him, had entered into *a sharp contention* with him, and had *condemned* him without showing any sufficient cause. The hand of Providence had grievously afflicted him, and therefore God also seemed to *contend* with him. He

was as one summoned to his bar, and about to be condemned, and yet he knew not 'wherefore.' His plea in effect is, Do not treat me, Lord, as they do: but show me wherefore thou contendest with me.

(2) It is implied notwithstanding, that *there might be sufficient cause* for the affliction, and he prays that it might be shown him. Oh do not condemn me, without showing me the reason why! Such language we may be permitted to use, in all our pleadings with God under affliction.

I. Notice the import of the petition, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me."

The word "contend" is sometimes used for strife in *battle*, and sometimes for litigations and pleadings in *law*. The latter is the meaning of the text. There is a time appointed when God will 'contend with all flesh;' and there are seasons in the present life when he institutes a judicial enquiry, and calls us to an account before him.

The term when applied to the conduct of God towards us, implies much *forbearance* on his part; for when men contend with men they generally put forth all their might, whether in dispute or in battle; but if God were thus to contend with us, we should be consumed in a moment. In his contendings therefore he employs *second causes*, and thus makes us feel by degrees, as we are able to bear it. In his dealings with his own people especially there is much more forbearance and mercy, than in his conduct towards others. Isai. lviii. 16. Job xxiii. 6.

With all this forbearance there is at the same time something *awfully impressive* in God's contending with us. To think of His being against us, and of his hand being stretched out against us, is more affecting, if duly considered, than if all the world were opposed to us. 'If God be for us, who can be against us;' but if He be against us, who shall defend our cause! This made Job entreat the pity of his friends, saying, 'The hand of God hath touched me.' Chap. xix. 21.

II. Observe a few of the ways in which God may be said to contend with us.

1. Sometimes he has a controversy with the *nations*, and then those great national calamities, the sword, pestilence, and famine, are visited upon us, with all their attendant evils. Isai. lxvi. 15, 16. God has thus been contending with the nations, for many years past, and his hand is stretched out still. Some he has given up to strife and contention, some to ambition and the love of dominion, and others to a malignant hatred of whatever is beneficial in society, or worthy of the nature of man; so that the effect of his anger become visible in the evils inflicted by one nation upon another.

2. Sometimes God's controversy is with particular *families*, and then he deals with them by adverse providences, sending poverty, sickness or death. Disorders and contentions are sometimes suffered to arise in families, as part of the Lord's controversy, as in the case of Eli and of David.

3. More commonly the Lord contends with ***individuals.*** He walks contrary to every sinner that walks contrary to him. Lev. xxvi. 23, 24. Yet he does not always load them with outward troubles, for many go on at ease, and know no change. But where he has designs of mercy, he will often make their path crooked and painful, and render their perseverance in it an object of considerable difficulty. Ephraim was like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, and many like him have thus been brought to their right mind. Jer. xxxi. 18, 19. The Prodigal also was reclaimed by severe adversity. Luke xv. 17, 18. God sometimes contends by his word, producing strong convictions, and bringing the sinner into great distress.

4. God also contends with *his own people*, in many ways, as he did with Job—

(1) By those calamities which are common to *other men.* Others may indeed consider them as things of course, and take little or no notice of them; but if we judge rightly, we shall consider that afflictions and losses are God's hand stretched out against us. Also by suffering men to oppress, reproach, and injure us, God may show that he himself has a controversy with us. Psal. xvii. 13.

(2) By making *sin itself* become our *punishment.* When sinners are going on in their evil ways, they are often suffered to prosper; but if Abraham turn aside, he must suffer for it. Gen. xx. 9. Thus God also dealt with David after he had sinned, and brought trouble upon his family to the end of life.

(3) By *withholding his blessing* from the means of grace, so that when God contends with his people, there is no peace, no rest to the soul. Reading, hearing, praying is all in vain. This is a species of spiritual judgments, the most awful of all, as they are commonly followed with greater sin. Isai. lvii. 17.

(4) Sometimes God contends with his people by even causing them to *die under his frown.* This was the case with Lot, and even with Moses. Deut. xxxii. 49—51.

III. Consider the importance of knowing the cause of God's controversy with us: " Show me wherefore thou contendest with me."

We sometimes do not know the immediate cause of affliction. Sin blinds the mind, especially to our own sins. Too often also we forget our sins, but God does not. Gen. xlii. 21. This is generally the case with sinners, Isai. xlii. 25; and too often so with good men, as it was with Job.

1. While we know not the cause of trouble, *the design* of God's controversy is lost upou us; and we shall go on in the frowardness of our hearts.

2. We shall always be in danger of *fretting against Providence*, and falling out with instruments and second causes. We shall think every thing to be wrong, and every one unkind.

3. There is no other way of being *brought to repentance*, but by knowing wherefore God is contending with us. Sin not known or recollected, cannnot be laid to heart; nor can our backslidings ever be healed.

4. Though of importance to know the real cause of trouble, yet that alone *will not effect a cure*. For this we must repair to the blood of the cross; that only possesses efficacy to heal and to save. Psal. xli. 4.

HOPE IN GOD CONNECTED WITH HOLY OBEDIENCE.

That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.—Psalm. lxxviii. 7.

The Psalmist here assumes the tender character of a father towards his people, and is concerned to impart to them religious instruction, ver. 1. The immediate inducement was, their having been taught the things of God by their forefathers, ver. 3, 4; and the order which God had established in his church and kingdom, ver. 5. The end of all this is to accomplish the great object mentioned in the text.

I. Consider the things particularly recommended to our notice.

These are three and such as are comprehensive of the whole of true religion;—a lively hope, and a recollection of past mercies, accompanied with evangelical obedience.

1. That we might *set our hope in God*. Hope is a principle of vast importance, it is that which bears up the moral world. It is of unspeakable consequence therefore that it be rightly fixed, and this only is the case when it is fixed on God. This implies the following things. (1) That God must be *the ground of all our hope*. It supposes that he has revealed himself through a Mediator, as the portion of them that love him, or there would have been no ground for a sinner to hope in God; but through Christ he is become our refuge and our portion in the land of the living. On this ground therefore we must build, or the building cannot stand. xxviii. 16. (2) It implies that God must be *the object of our hope*, as well as the ground of it. We may look for happiness from other quarters, but if we do we shall be deceived. We may hope for many comforts in this life, for peace and prosperity; but if we hope for these things without God, they will only disappoint us. Every earthly comfort is that which God makes it to us: if He be against us, what are all things besides! We must hope for something beyond this life, or we shall be miserable. (3) It implies that our hope must so be set in God as to *confide in Him with all the heart*. It is to exercise a stedfast and implicit reliance on him at all times, in opposition to that 'stubborn and rebellious generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God,' ver. 8.

2. Another thing recommended is, that we *do not forget the works of God*. Great things were wrought for Israel, many of which

are recorded in this pslam; and these they were charged "not to forget." We see the sad effects of this kind of forgetfulness in the people of Israel, in the time of Moses, ver, 10, 11; and in subsequent periods of their history. Judges viii. 34. But what have *we* to remember? Greater works than they had, and to which all God's works then were only preparatory. The great work of *redemption* is that for which all other works were made, and to the accomplishment of which they become subservient. We are never to forget the means by which our souls are redeemed, or the price paid for them; must never forget Gethsemane and Calvary, but consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession. Heb. iii. 1. Never forget that faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, even the chief; never forget the mercy promised to believers, and the wrath denounced against unbelief.

II. Observe the connection which these things have with each other.

1. If we "set not our hope in God," our remembrance of his works, and our obedience to his commands will be *essentially defective.* We shall be mere pharisees with the latter without the former. The unbelieving Jews split on this rock: they were religious in their way, but as their hope was not in God, it all came to nothing. They had indeed the history of God's works in the sacred writings which were put into their hands, and heard it read every sabbath day in their synagogues: they were also very attentive to ceremonial commands: yet they stumbled at the stumbling-stone. Rom. ix. 31, 32. Many in our day have heard and read of the great events recorded in the gospel, as they did in the law, and have them also in their memories, and are very observant of the externals of christianity; but who after all do not set their hope in God all such religion is vain.

2. If the hope we have in God, does not lead us to "remember his works, and keep his commandments," it is a *false and delusive hope*, and we are as far off from true religion as in the former case. The narrow way is that of faith and holy obedience: faith will not avail without obedience, nor obedience without faith. Psal. cxix. 166. Faith without works is dead, being alone; and works without faith cannot please God. They must be both connected to prove our hearts sincere. James ii. 17, 18.

3. If we set our hope in God with all our heart, the *remembrance* of his works will tend to keep that hope alive, and the keeping of his commandments will be our chief delight.

III. The importance of the subject as affecting our present and future interests.

1. If our hope be set in God *it shall not be liable to disappointment;* but if we set our hope on any other object it will be attended with the utmost uncertainty. We may promise ourselves happiness in the possession of this or the other earthly good, but there is no depen-

dence upon it. As the world will deceive us, so prosperity and wealth may elude our most intense pursuit; or if not, there may be something to embitter the enjoyment. But if our hope be set in God, whether we have little or much of earthly good, we shall enjoy God in all, and that is our best portion. Psal. xvii. 14, 15. lxxiii. 25, 26.

2. If our hope be set in God we shall be *supported under the ills of the present life.* Trials and difficulties must be expected, and wo to him who has no God to go to when troubles come! The health we now enjoy, the comforts we possess, may soon be taken from us: but if we have set our hope in God, we shall be happy in every condition, and not be afraid with any amazement.

STATE OF NATURE AND OF GRACE.

At that time ye were without Christ, being aliens frow the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ.—Ephesians ii. 12, 13.

It is of great importance to be reminded of what we were by nature, and what we are by grace. This is a subject much dwelt upon in all the Epistles, partly to excite humility, and partly to awaken gratitude and praise. Our obligations to grace cannot be felt, but in proportion as we realize what our state is by nature: these are counter parts to each other, and constitute the very vitals of the gospel.

I. Let us humbly meditate on what we were by nature, according to the representation given us in the text, ver. 12.

It is true, we were not in all respects like the benighted heathen, nor like the idolatrous Ephesians. In our unregenerate state we were under the light of revelation, and enjoyed some of its advantages; yet it will be useful to remember what our forefathers were, what a great part of mankind still are, and what we ourselves should have been, but for the light of the gospel. The heathen are here described as being "without Christ, without hope, and without God in the world;" and in illustration of this state, the apostle describes them as "aliens and strangers," totally unacquainted with the advantages enjoyed by the people of Israel, who had a commonwealth and covenants of promise.

Let us therefore briefly take a view of the state of Israel, and observe the condition of the heathen as forming a direct contrast. In doing this we shall find much by way of inference that is applicable to ourselves.

It is supposed of Israel, that being a commonwealth, and having covenants of promise, they were not without Christ, nor without hope, nor without God in the world. The covenants they possessed must have

been in subserviency to Christ, to whom they all related, and must therefore have furnished a sufficient ground of hope.

1. The people of Israel were *a commonwealth*, a kind of city or state which had its peculiar privileges. It was esteemed an honour to be a citizen of Rome; it was a still greater one to be a citizen of Zion, the city of the great King, and where God was known in her palaces for a refuge. To them the oracles of God and the ordinances of his house were committed. Within this city Christ was known and believed in, Moses and all the fathers died in the faith of him, the whole of their laws and government were preparatory to his coming, and prefigurative of that event.

Yet all this was overlooked by the generality of mankind, who neither knew the value of those blessings, nor desired an interest in them. A few of the gentiles were proselyted, and admitted into this sacred community; but the far greater part of them were "aliens" from this commonwealth, and enjoyed none of its advantages.

2. Israel had *the covenants of promise*, some of which had existed ever since the fall of man. A promise was made to Adam concerning the Seed of the woman, and a covenant of mercy was given to Noah and his posterity. Yet all this was contained only in the oracles of God, and these only were with Israel; so that the world in general were strangers to it, and lived in darkness and uncertainty.

"The covenants" however were chiefly those made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to Israel at Sinai, each of which contained promises relating to the Messiah. The covenant was afterwards renewed with David, which became all his salvation and all his desire, and contained all those 'sure mercies' which belonged to his spiritual seed. Isai. lv. 3. Psal. lxxxix.

These were the great covenants of promise, to which the gentile world were utter strangers; in which also we had no interest while in a state of ignorance and unbelief.

3. Being thus without a knowledge of the Saviour, *they had no hope*, no well-grounded hope of futurity, nothing on which to build an expectation of eternal life. The gentiles felt themselves to be mortal, and must know that they were sinners; but had no knowledge of the way in which sin could be pardoned, or a sinner find acceptance with God. They therefore had no hope in death, no hope of a resurrection to eternal life; but when they died, went to a world utterly unknown. Such was and still is the miserable state of the heathen world, previous to the introduction of the gospel.

4. They are next described as being *without God in the world*, a kind of atheists, who had no knowledge of or belief in the true and living God. They had gods many, and lords many, but all the gods of the heathen are vanity. The only true and living God they knew not, loved him not, neither desired the knowledge of his ways. The world was full of light and full of mercy, but the great author of all good was invisible and unknown; they neither feared him, nor hoped in his mercy. Such is the awful darkness in which heathenism has involved a large and miserable portion of the human race.

Let us here make a few reflections on our own state and condition by

nature, and see wherein it differs from that of the heathen world at large—

(1) The description given in the text would have been fully applicable *to our forefathers*, and to us also, but for the light of the gospel. What cause then for thankfulness, that we have been delivered in any measure from such a state of guilt and hopeless misery.

(2) Such however is the condition of the *greater part of the world* to this day. The light of truth has never shone upon them, the voice of mercy has not been heard. What reason then to be concerned about them, and to aid the universal diffusion of the gospel.

(3) Though we have never been without those *objective advantages*, of which so large a portion of mankind are still deprived, yet being by nature so full of subjective ignorance and enmity, we were in effect in the same condition, ver. 3; and multitudes around are still heathens in a christian land. In proportion also as the light of revelation is enjoyed, guilt is incurred by its rejection. To be "without Christ," under the gospel; to be "aliens," while dwelling amongst the people of God; to be "strangers from the covenants of promise," while hearing of them every Lord's day; to be "without hope," though a refuge is set before us; and to be living "without God in the world," while the world is full of gospel light, is not only totally inexcusable, but incurs an enormity of guilt unknown even among the heathen themselves. Matt. xi. 21—24.

II. Consider what we are by grace, through the coming and the death of Christ, ver. 13.

"But now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ." The expression, "in Christ Jesus," seems opposed to our being "without Christ," ver. 12; and denotes that we have believed in him, and become one with him. Now therefore, "ye who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ."

Two things may be observed on this part of the subject—the blessing enjoyed by believers, and the medium through which it is bestowed.

1. *The blessing itself*, which belongs to us as christians: "we are made nigh." The term is very expressive, and is used of Israel as a people. Deut. iv. 7. Psal. cxlviii. 14. It includes reconciliation and peace with God adoption into his family, and being treated as children with liberty of access, and intimate communion with him as our Father. Psal. cxlv. 18. Hence believers are represented as being associated with God the Judge of all, and with Jesus the Mediator, as well as with an innumerable company of angels. Heb. xii. 22—24.

2. *The medium* through which the blessing is bestowed: ye are made nigh "by the blood of Christ." It is only by the sacrifice of Christ that we could have peace with God: this only could atone for sin, and in this way God could express his infinite displeasure against it, while he abounded in forgiveness towards us. In this he smelt a sweet savour, as in the offering up of Noah's sacrifice. Ephes. v. 1. It is by preaching the doctrine of the cross that sinners are

brought nigh to God. They might indeed be convinced of sin without it, but could have no hope of reconciliation, or find rest to their souls.

Let us learn the value of our mercies, especially such as are spiritual by the price they cost, the price of blood.

Let us thankfully avail ourselves of the medium by which we may draw nigh to God. If ever we wish for nearness to him, it must be sought alone by the sacrifice and mediation of the Son of God.

DANGER OF WORLDLY CONNECTIONS.

And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramoth-gilead? And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses.—1 Kings xxii. 4.

Ahab's character and the history of his reign remove all surprise at any thing he did, or might be disposed to do. At one time he sends Benhadad home in peace, and at another, without any fresh provocation, he will have war with him to recover Ramoth-gilead. But what is most surprising, is the conduct of Jehoshaphat in forming an alliance with such a man, and going at once into all his measures. We cannot read the account in the text without reflecting on the weakness of this good man, to see them betrayed into folly by the wicked policy of this infamous king of Israel.

I. Briefly review the conduct of Jehoshaphat.

It may be very sinful in itself, and attended with many evil consequences.

1. It was a great sin for him to *abound in horses.* To check inordinate ambition, and the love of conquest, the divine law had prohibited the multiplication of horses. Deut. xvii. 16; and it does not appear that any of the kings of Israel kept horses for war until the reign of Solomon, and from thence they became a snare. Jehoshaphat had followed this example, regardless of the divine commandment.

2. It was a still greater sin to yield them up *to the disposal of such a man as Ahab*, who had sold himself to work wickedness. If he had kept his horses merely to fight the Lord's battles, it might have been some excuse; but to place them under the direction of Ahab, and to make himself a partner in his crimes, was most unpardonable. No doubt it was the politeness of a king and of a courtier that did this, in the absence of religious principle.

3. It was a still greater sin to promise to go up to Ramoth-gilead, *after he had heard the words of Micaiah the prophet.* Jehoshaphat seems to have suspected all those prophets who had advised

the enterprise, and foretold its success; and these suspicions were fully confirmed by the Lord's prophet yet he presumed to go up to battle.

4. It was an aggravation of his sin, that Jehoshaphat formed *a similar confederacy a second time* with some wicked kings of Israel, and lent his horses again to go to battle. So easy is it to repeat an evil once indulged. 2 Kings iii. 7.

5. It nearly *cost him his life* in both instances, and he had liked to have paid dear for his temporising policy. 1 Kings xxii. 31, 32. Similar to the case of Lot, lingering on the plains of Sodom, the Lord being merciful to him, delivered him from destruction.

6. Yet sinful and dangerous as his conduct was, *many things might be pleaded in excuse.* It appears to have originated in an amiable desire to please, in a pliability of temper that is natural to feeble-minded men. He was also aware of the bitterness and rancour of some of the former kings of Israel against Judah, and was disposed to adopt conciliatory measures, in the hope of preserving the peace of the two kingdoms; and if they were not quite of one mind, they were nearer together than the kings of any other nation.

II. Apply the subject to ourselves.

In general we may learn from it the sin and danger of worldly conformity. When the people of Israel dwelt alone they prospered, but when they mixed with the politics and maxims of the surrounding nations, they degenerated in their principles, and were involved in perpetual strife and contention. It is the same with christians societies, and also with individuals; their purity and prosperity depend upon their coming out, and being separated. Cor. vi. 14—19. Rom. xii. 2.

More particularly—

1. We may learn from hence to beware of *whatever may lead us into temptation.* If Jehoshaphat had not kept up such a military establishment, if he had relied more upon Providence for the safety and protection of his dominions, and had not violated a divine command in providing himself with a large body of cavalry to answer such a purpose, he would have been more immediately under the divine safeguard; but his alliance would not in that case have been so eagerly sought by such a man as Ahab, and he would therefore have been free from so dangerous a connection. There are also certain accomplishments which may expose us to similar temptations. Even the education, the refined manners, the genius and talents of some persons, prove a snare to them, by leading them into habits and connections that are ruinous to their principles. It is better to be without such ornamental advantages than to possess them, if they are of no other use than to lead us into worldly company.

2. Beware of making the *opinion of the world the rule and standard of our conduct.* In the eyes of worldly men many things appear to be quite harmless, which are highly offensive in the sight of God: and if our dispositions are naturally pliable, let us be careful not

to indulge them at the expense of a good conscience. While we guard against bigotry and intolerance, let us be equally careful of sinful compliances which involve the sacrifice of principle.

3. Learn to beware of *persisting in an evil way*, contrary to the mind and will of God, and in opposition to our own convictions. This was the sin of Jehoshaphat, who if he had not suffered himself to be governed by the wily policy of Ahab, whould not have gone up to Ramothgilead to battle. And it was a dangerous thing thus to stifle conviction, to disregard the intimations of a prophet, in order to accommodate himself to the wishes of a powerful but abandoned prince. Tenderness of conscience and a prevailing fear of God would have prevented so great an evil.

4. In this case we see that *piety alone is not all that is necessary in princes and rulers*, or in those who have the management and direction of public affairs. The religion of Jehoshaphat can scarcely be questioned, yet we see him the abettor of measures which God abhorred; we see him forming alliances and mixing with a system of politics, at variance with every principle of benevolence, and with the best interests of men. The divine right of Ahab to govern wrong might be an undoubted maxim with good Jehoshaphat, as it has been with many other public characters; and this fallacious maxim might more than save him from remorse, while yielding his personal support, and wasting the resources of his country, in favour of a man, whom the Scriptures have branded with eternal infamy. Not only religion but enlarged and enlightened views, with a resolution to adopt whatever is beneficial in society, are essential to a good government.

5. Let us beware of continuing *those connections* which have already proved *a snare to us*. Jehoshaphat did not exercise this caution: having survived Ahab, he afterwards entered into a political confederacy with the wicked Jehoram. It might gratify his vanity to be thus allied, but it nearly proved his ruin. There is a difficulty in declining connections that are flatering by the distinction they confer, or the worldly advantages that follow in their train; but if they are fatal to virtue, or injurious to our spiritual interest, they must be given up, though it be like plucking out a right eye, or cutting off a right hand.

6. Beware of those evils to which even *an amiable disposition* may expose us. There is a yielding in the temper of some men which is a great snare to their souls. They do not like to offend, are willing to please, and so are led into evil. Not only Jehoshaphat, but Peter, a man of much sterner piety, fell into this snare, by his temporising conduct at Antioch. Gal. ii. 12.

7. If we have been *delivered from such evils*, after going in the way of temptation, let us beware that we do not expose ourselves in future to their influence.

JOYFUL IMPORT OF THE GOSPEL.

And there was great joy in that city.—Acts viii. 8.

The christian church has from its infancy been subject to great vicissitudes, and like the moon it has continually waxed and waned. When the disciples first found the Messiah they were full of joy; when he was crucified they were covered with a cloud of darkness; but when he arose from the dead their hopes and joys revived again. The work of grace at Jerusalem, in the conversion of so many thousands, makes them a little heaven upon earth; but soon a storm of persecution followed. See the blessed Stephen stoned to death, and Saul making havoc of the church, ver. 2. Yet out of all this evil much good arises, and now there is another triumph to the cause of truth and righteousness. "Philip went down to Samaria and preached Christ unto them—and there was great joy in that city."

I. It is deserving of remark, that the seat of this holy triumph was "the city of Samaria."

Well may it be said, 'the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom like the rose;' for such indeed was the city of Samaria.

1. Its inhabitants consisted partly of *heathens* and partly of *apostate Jews*, who had a sort of half heathenised religion among them. They had been a superstitious and degenerate people from the time of Salmanezer, and such they still continued. 2 Kings xvii. 33, 34. They set up a temple on mount Gerizzim in opposition to that on mount Moriah, and carried on a kind of worship which Christ condemned. John iv. 22. They had also manifested the greatest aversion to the Jews, and to Christ and his followers as being of that nation. Luke ix. 51—53. A hopeless and inveterate people!

2. Yet this very city is celebrated for its *reception of the gospel*, and was one of the first to surrender to the arms of truth. On the report of the woman, after the interview at Jacob's well, the Samaritans showed a disposition to listen to the gospel, and they received the Saviour very courteously. John iv. 39—42. And now when Philip went down and preached Christ to them, "the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did," ver. 6. Thus was fulfilled the prediction of our Lord to the woman of Samaria, and also to his disciples. John iv. 23, 35. Thus also the Lord builds up Jerusalem, and gathers together the outcasts of Israel. Psal. cxlvii. 2. Isai. lvi. 6—8.

II. The joy which now prevailed in the city of Samaria is fully accounted for by the cause which produced it.

Joy is never excited but on some great occasion, and the seasons of

religious joy are distinguished by some interesting or extraordinary occurrence. Such was the joy and gladness at the preparation for building the temple of Jerusalem, 1 Chron. xxix. 9: at Hezekiah's passover, 2 Chron. xxx. 25, 26: at the rebuilding and dedication of the city wall, Neh. xii. 43: at the birth of Christ, Luke ii. 10—14: at the appearance of the star to the eastern magi, Matt. ii. 13: and at the ascension of our blessed Saviour, Luke xxiv. 52. All these were great events, and furnished an abundant source of joy and rejoicing.

We may therefore expect something great and interesting in the present instance, to fill a whole city with joy and what was it? Answer, the glad tidings of the gospel: that Christ was come, that he died for sinners, that he had risen again, that he had ascended above all heavens, and lived to make intercession for transgressors; that through faith in him there was now forgiveness and acceptance with God, and this news was proclaimed to all nations.

Some may say that these are common things, and they have been proclaimed in other cities as well as in Samaria, and we have all heard of them before. Be it so: if you have cordially received them, there is enough to occasion great joy; and if they have not produced such an effect, it is because they have not been fully realized by faith.

Let us then recapitulate the leading facts of the gospel, and observe the glad tidings contained in them—

1. Is it not ground for joy that *the Lord is come into the world to save sinners?* This is what the church was looking for, nearly four thousand years. This was the great theme of prophetic inspiration, from age to age; and what Israel was commanded to rejoice in, even from the days of old. Zech. ix. 9. The prospect of our Saviour's advent inspired not only the ancient church, but even the whole creation with joy and gladness. Psal. xcvi. 11—13. If therefore Samaria had not exulted in this great event, there would have been no sympathy, no correspondence with the ancient believers, and of course no evidence of their belief in its existence or reality. If we also profess to believe in the coming of Christ, and the great objects of his appearance, and are still indifferent and unaffected, it proves our faith to be utterly vain. Shall glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good will to men be nothing to us; and yet shall we be allowed to call ourselves christians!

2. Is it not ground for joy that *Christ has laid down his life for us,* and redeemed us unto God by his blood? It is true his death caused sorrow to the disciples for a time; but when they understood the design of that great event, their sorrow was turned into joy.
Consider in what light this interesting truth is held up to us in the Scriptures. 'But now in the end of the world hath he appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice to himself—When he had by himself purged our sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.' Heb. ix. 26. i. 3. On this inestimable sacrifice is founded a new and everlasting covenant, promising forgiveness, and securing eternal life to all that believe. Heb. viii. 10—12. 2 Cor. v. 18, 19. John iii. 16.
This is the source of the first hope and joy to an awakened sinner, and it has turned the sorrow of many into gladness. We may afterwards de-

rive comfort from a consciousness of believing in Christ, and being interested in him; but the first is from looking to him, looking out of ourselves, and beholding the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

3. Is it not a matter of great joy that *Christ is risen from the dead?* This proves that he was the true Messiah, that his sacrifice is accepted, and that justice is fully satisfied. 'The God of peace brought again from the dead that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant—and raised him up and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God.' Heb. xiii. 20. 1 Pet. i. 21. The resurrection of Christ is also the pattern and the pledge of our own resurrection, and is therefore on this account a matter of joyful exultation. 1 Cor. xv. 20. Phil. iii. 21.

4. Is it not matter of joy too, that *Christ has ascended into glory:* and that he ever liveth to make intercession for us? On this ground it is that he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. Heb. vii. 25. If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father. 1 John ii. 1. Having entered into his glory, he is become heir of all things, and possesses the power of enriching his church, and of ruling in the midst of his enemies. Psal. lxviii. 18. cx. 1, 2. Ephes. i. 20—22.

5. That through faith in his name there is *forgiveness of sin, and acceptance with God?* The import of the gospel is, Believe in Jesus, and ye shall be saved; submit to his righteousness, and ye shall be accepted, whatever be your past sins, or present unworthiness. Look off from all duties of your own, and plead that obedience with which God is well pleased. Come unto me, says Jesus, and ye shall find rest to your souls—and him that cometh I will in no wise cast out. John vi. 37. If such tidings do not gladden the heart, it is only because we have neither part nor lot in the matter.

6. Is it not a source of joy that this gospel *is now sent to all nations?* Salvation originated with the Jews: theirs were the covenants, and the giving of the law; and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came. But the gentiles were to be grafted in, and to partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree; and now there is a community of privileges and of blessedness.

7. Was it not a special matter of joy to the Samaritans, that *they themselves had believed the gospel?* If Israel of old rejoiced that they were willing to build the house of the Lord, much more may we rejoice to see the spiritual temple edified and built up, especially if our hands also are in the work. Philip the evangelist rejoiced in the success of his labour, the Samaritans rejoiced in the doctrines of the cross, and that the kingdom of God was come nigh unto them.

REFLECTIONS.

(1) If then the gospel bring tidings of great joy, why is it reproached as tending to gloom and melancholy? Can any thing be more unreasonable or unjust.

(2) Why do individuals despond, while there is such an exhibition of

mercy? Because they do not hearken to the gospel, nor receive the record which God hath given of his Son.

(3) Why do not christians possess more joy and peace in believing? Because we have not more religion, do not live more under the influence of the gospel. Lord increase our faith.

THE PRAYER OF JABEZ.

And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me. And God granted him that which he requested.—1 Chronicles iv. 10.

It is probable that Jabez lived soon after the conquest of Canaan, when Israel was straitened by the remainder of the Canaanites, dwelling in the land: and that hence the prayer in the text was offered.

His name was given him in consequence of some particular circumstance attending his birth, as is the case with many others mentioned in the Scriptures; yet if his mother feared God, and lived to see the excellent character of her son, her sorrow would be turned into joy. Parents are often mistaken in the ideas they form of their children, especially in judging from some circumctances attending their earliest days. Thus Eve rejoiced in the birth of Cain, and said, 'I have gotten me a man, the Lord;' but took much less notice of the birth of Abel.

Jabez is said to have been 'more honourable than his brethren,' and he might be so on account of his achievements, for he seems to have been of the same spirit as Caleb and Joshua. But it is probable that his chief eminence consisted in his being a man of prayer, a man of God. True religion is true honour: his brethren might be good men, but he excelled them all.

I. Notice the import of Jabez's prayer.

1. The character under which he called upon God: "the God of Israel." This is praying to him in a covenant relation, as the God of his fathers; and this would encourage him in each of the requests he had to offer. This also may serve as a pattern and a rule for us. There is no other ground for faith but the promises, and to them we must have respect, that he may bless us according to his own word. He prayed in the language of that covenant under which he lived: and so must we. It is as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that he now blesses us with all spiritual blessings; and it is under this character that all our petitions are to be presented at the throne of grace. Jabez might have a special reference to his great progenitor Jacob, when he wrestled with the angel, and obtained the name of

Israel: this also would inspire him with faith and hope, and excite a spirit of emulation. Let us also remember the prevailing importunity of primitive believers, and those of later times, and be encouraged to follow their example.

2. The petitions which he presented: "that he might be blessed indeed, that his coast might be enlarged, that God might be with him, and that he might be kept from evil"—

(1) "That thou wouldest bless me indeed." This singular expression evidently alludes to the covenant made with Abraham, when the Lord said to him, 'In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thee;' that is, he would do it 'indeed,' and do it abundantly. The coveneant of Abraham abounded with blessings, not only with those which are temporal, but with such as are spiritual, even with all those which come upon his spiritual seed. These are the blessings which Esau despised, when he sold his birthright, but which Jabez so ardently desired.

(2) "And enlarge my coast." This might have the appearance of selfishness or worldly-mindedness, as if he wanted a large estate or more land to dwell in: but considering the end of God's giving him the land, and that he fully entered into that design, the desire of Jabez would be like that of Caleb's; it would be taking the land as God's inheritance, in which he would afterwards place his name. This therefore is no example of covetousness, but rather of an honourable and disinterested concern for the divine glory, and the public interests of religion.

(3) "And that thine hand might be with me;" that is, his power, his favour and support. This refers to his driving out the idolatrous Canaanites, knowing that he should not otherwise prevail against them. This it was that inspired the minds of Caleb and Joshua with so much courage: the Lord was with them. 'If the Lord delight in us, said they, he will give us the land, and we will go up and possess it.'

(4) "And that thou wouldest keep me from evil." He would need the Lord to be with him to shield him from danger, and succour him in the hour of distress. He would meet with much of this sort to grieve him, especially when the enemies prevailed against Israel: this would give to them a triumph, but it would fill him with grief, to see the name of the Lord reproached and blasphemed. But the greatest grief and trouble to a good man is moral evil, and from this it was that Jabez chiefly prayed to be delivered. The greatest and best of men need to be "kept" in this respect, and have often been brought into grief and trouble by it.

3. The next particular to be noticed is the earnestness of his prayer: "Oh" that thou wouldest bless me indeed— This is an expletive which is often used in vain, and when but little is intended by it: but in the language of Scripture it is very expressive, and full of meaning. The language of Jacob was, 'I will not let thee go except thou bless me:' that of David, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after:' that of Jabez is very similar, 'Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed.' All expressive of earnest and intense desire.

4. The success with which his prayer was attended: "And God

granted him that which he requested." The prayer of faith is never offered in vain; and the answer which he obtained is a proof that his heart was right with God, and that he was not influenced by selfish motives. His prayer had for its object the glory of God, and the good of his cause in the world.

II. Observe how the subject is applicable to ourselves.

It may direct and afford us encouragement in prayer in two respects—

1. In our concern for the spread of the gospel in the world. No prayer is more fitted to the lips of a faithful minister in the outset of his course, and all the way through it; and not for themselves only, but also for the salvation of others. Psal. xx. 1—4.

2. It is a prayer that will apply to the promotion of true religion in our own souls. Let us not be content unless we are blessed "indeed," and let us be concerned to enter into the gospel rest by enlargedness of heart that the hand of the Lord may also be with us in all we do that we may be kept from evil, and from that grief and sorrow of heart which arises out of it.

THE JUDGMENT OF GUILTY NATIONS.

And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come; and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved—Acts ii. 19—21.

This is part of Peter's sermon on the day of pentecost, which begins at ver. 14. The prophecy referred to by the apostle is in Joel ii. 28.

(1) By "the day of the Lord," ver. 20, is meant the day of Jerusalem's destruction; the day of reckoning with them for the blood of the prophets, and above all for the blood of the Saviour; a day of judgment in miniature, and the prelude of "that great and notable day of the Lord." We here see that there are days which the Lord will appoint to reckon with guilty nations; and though the vengeance may tarry, yet it will surely come. Those nations especially which have shed the blood of the martyrs may expect in their turn to be visited, and this may be the reason why the antichristian nations have in our day been successively overturned and desolated by so many awful judgments, and why the Lord's hand is stretched out still. It is the day of retribution for past offences. Rev. xiii. 10.

(2) The "signs and wonders" which should precede this awful day should appear in heaven above, and in the earth beneath. These were partly in a way of mercy, and partly in a way of judgment. Those

mentioned in ver. 17, 18, are in a way of mercy; and those in ver. 19 20 in a way of judgment. The spirit of God should be poured out upon the church, while the vials of wrath are poured out upon its enemies. So God is now carrying on his work in heathen countries, amidst all the confusion and distress which attend the nations of Europe.

The prediction so full of mercy was fulfilled on the day of pentecost, at the time the apostle spoke: the latter would soon follow, in the space of forty years, when Jerusalem was utterly destroyed by the Romans. This is the same event as was foretold by our Lord in Matt. xxiv. 29, 30, and in Luke xxi. 25.

The remarkable appearances which should precede and accompany this terrible catastrophe, are distinguished into "wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath." The fact, according to well accredited history is, that many awful signs did appear in the heavens just before the destruction of the jewish city and nation; or if understood symbolically, there was a total eclipse, an extinction of their religious and civil polity, by that dreadful event. The "blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke," which appeared in the earth beneath, were fearfully realised in the bloody wars which followed, and in the burning of towns and cities, whose vapour and smoke darkened the heavens, and proclaimed the great desolation of fire and sword.

(3) Amidst all these calamities, mercy should be provided for the distressed; for "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Or as the prophet expresses it, 'In mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said.' Joel ii. 32. In the day of trouble Jesus is the hope of his people, and it is on his name that they are encouraged to call.

Such a state of things cannot fail to remind us of the corresponding state of the church and of the world in our day. Successful efforts are making for the enlargement of Christ's kingdom, while there is 'upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring.' Luke xxi. 25, 26. Oh how happy if these calls from heaven are seriously regarded, and if we also are led to seek the salvation of our souls.

I. Enquire what is intended by our "calling on the name of the Lord."

1. It is *an act of adoration*, and includes *the whole of spiritual worship*. Hence the public commencement of true religion in the world is expressed in this way; 'then began men to call on the name of the Lord.' Gen. iv. 26. The worship which Abraham offered in every place where he pitched his tent is distinguished by his 'calling on the name of the Lord.' Thus also the worship of primitive christians is represented: they 'called on the name of the Lord Jesus,' in all churches of the saints. Acts vii. 59. Rom. x. 12, 13. 1 Cor. i. 2, This unquestionably implies the true divinity of Christ, for the commandment is, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Matt. iv. 10. The divinity of our Saviour is a doctrine of such vital importance, that on it is founded the efficacy of

the atonement, and all the confidence of the true believer. Heb. i. 3. 2 Tim. i. 12.

2. It denotes prayer, and *prayer especially for salvation.* Calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus implies, that there is salvation in no other, and that this is the only door of hope tô a ruined world. It pleaseth the Father that in him should all fullness dwell, and pardon and life are in his hands. John iii. 36. Acts. iv. 12. Heb. vii. 25.

3. It is expressive of *the prayer of faith*, for that alone will be accepted. Not all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved, but all who call upon him in faith. Rom. x. 13, 14. Cain was not accepted, nor the Pharisees, though they made long prayers. The prayer of the self-righteous and impenitent is an abomination to the Lord. Prov. xv. 8, 29. Hos. vii. 14.

4. Calling upon the name of the Lord denotes *fervency and importunity*, imploring immediate succour and relief, like Peter when ready to perish in the sea. David's prayer on various occasions is thus described. Psal. iv. 1. lxxxvi. 3—5. xcix. 6. cxlv. 18. The Lord also loves that his people should be importunate, and give him no rest. Isai. lxii. 6, 7. Luke xviii. 1.

5. The encouragement here given to prayer *is addressed to all:* for "whosoever" shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. None are exempt; but whosoever cometh he will in no wise cast out, whatever may have been their former state and character. Isai. lv. 1. Matt. xi. 29. John vi. 37.

II. Notice the warning given by various calamities to make the Lord our refuge.

The apostle Peter considered these in his day, and so should we.

1. It is one of the the great *designs of God*, in visiting the earth with calamities, that we should return to him. It is the voice of God calling to us, Come my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. Isai. xxvi. 20, 21. His hand is stretched out still, that we might see and fear and turn unto the Lord Isai. v. 25.

2. In a time of trouble every *earthly comfort* is held with great uncertainty, and we therefore need a surer portion. The rich are exhorted at all times not to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, more especially in a time of general trouble. To what a state have many of the most opulent been reduced in some of the continental nations, by the "blood and fire and vapour of smoke." As to the poor, who have so small a portion in this world, they had need surely to have an interest in Christ, and to seek after durable riches and righteousness.

3. In a time of trouble *life itself* is often held in suspense, and that therefore is a season for special prayer. What numbers have fallen by pestilential disease, by the sword of war, and other public calamities; and there is no safety in any case but in Christ.

4. The great *mercy of God* in providing such a refuge for us, especially in times of need, should induce us to call upon his name.

There will be a period when greater calamities than these shall come, and when there will be no hope, but men shall call upon the rocks and mountains in vain.

At present the promise stands firm; and if we call upon the name of the Lord in sincerity and in truth, we may be saved from temporal ruin: but if not, we shall be delivered from that which is eternal.

Our character as christians is in great measure decided by the habit we have formed, of calling upon the name of the Lord: and whether we trust in him at all times, and pour out our hearts before him. There may indeed be prayer where there is no faith, but there can be no true believing without prayer.

GROWING IN GRACE.

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all towards each other aboundeth.—2 Thessalonians i. 3.

Perhaps there is no christian society now on earth to whom this language is fully applicable; and it may be, if Paul had been writing to us, or to other christians of the present day, he would have adopted a different mode of address. It is nevertheless true, that among the primitive churches, they were not all alike prosperous, spiritual, and happy; but that at Thesalonica was one of the most amiable, and deserving of commendation. It is a mercy however if these blessed fruits are found amongst us in any degree, and it is profitable for us to take the best examples presented in the Scriptures, that we may learn our own defects, and be led to imitate what is more excellent.

(1) Observe, in giving "thanks to God" for their growth in faith and love, the apostle plainly intimates that it was by *the grace of God* they were what they were. Though all that is evil in us belongs to ourselves, yet all that is good in us is of God alone, even that which is commanded and required at our hands.

(2) The growth of faith and love plainly supposes that sanctification *is progressive.* It is like the kingdom of heaven in the world, which is compared to a grain of mustard seed, and a little leaven that leaveneth the whole lump. But if we had no inherent sanctification, and none but what is in Christ, this could not be true. Some indeed have endeavoured to comfort themselves, and to comfort others, while in a low declining state, by certain examples in Scripture; but it is our safest and best way to take examples of the most exalted kind.

(3) The growth of faith is here connected with that of *brotherly love,* as a cause is connected with its effect. Certainly, if we grow in faith, we shall also grow in love; because the same principle which attaches us to the truth, will attach us to one another for the truth's sake. Christ is the centre of union; all who love him are taught of God to love one another.

I. Attend to some af the evidences of this growth in grace, mentioned in the text.

Growth in grace is here supposed to be *visible*, or the apostle could not have seen it. It becomes visible by the fruits of righteousness which it produces; and if this be true of us, others will perceive it. Acts iv. 13.

1. Growing in faith will be seen in our taking increasing pleasure *in the means of faith*, the word of God. We shall find delight in reading and hearing it, and it will be to us the joy and rejoicing of our hearts. Psal. i. 2, 3. Prov. vi. 20—23. The word of Christ will dwell in us richly in all wisdom, and be received as the ingrafted word. Col. iii. 16. Seasons of public instruction will be attended with delight, and we shall not hear the word from custom, but from far higher motives. Isai. ii. 2.

2. It will appear in a growing attachment to *the doctrines of Christ*, who is himself the great object of faith. If a man could speak with great eloquence, he might please a certain description of hearers; but if Christ be not his theme, he would fail to please those who believe in him, for to them he is precious. 1 Pet. ii. 7. When therefore it is chiefly the manner, and not the subject of address that is regarded, it bespeaks a religion too much like that of the Corinthians, and not that of the Thessalonians. 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5.

3. Growing in faith consists in an *increasing acquaintance* with the mind of God in his word, as the ground of faith. We may be brought to believe the gospel in one day, but it is the work of a whole life to become rooted and grounded in the truth; to know not merely what we believe, but why; and to be able to say with Paul, 'I know whom I have believed.' We may believe what is true, from being told that it is so; but it will do us very little good, unless we perceive the authority on which it rests, and the principle by which it is supported in the Scriptures of truth. Our faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

4. It will be evident by increasing *patience and submission*, under all the ills of life. This was noticed in the Thessalonians, amidst the persecutions and tribulations which they endured, ver. 4. If we faint in the day of adversity our strength is small, and our faith is weak. Matt. xiv. 31.

5. By an increasing *weanedness from the present world*. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith, both in prosperity and adversity. John also speaks of those as being strong, who have overcome the wicked one, and have the word of God abiding in them. 1 John ii. 14. v. 4.

5. Growing in faith appeared in the *love they had one to another* for the truth's sake. Christians may live together without discredit, and esteem each other as friends; but to love as brethren, and as christians, is quite another thing. They may also love one another from being of the same mind, and yet not love on account of their being of the mind of Christ. Or if there be true christian love existing,

it may not "abound," as it did among the Thessalonians; yet this is necessary to prove that our faith "groweth exceedingly."

II. Consider the importance of the subject.

1. Growing in faith and love brings *glory to God*, ver. 12. Bearing much fruit honours him, and recommends the gospel to others. John. xv. 8.

2. It has an influence upon the *ministry of the word*, which is highly desirable. It is next to impossible to preach to some people, who instead of growing in faith have no faith at all, and Paul himself found it so. Heb. v. 11. But oh how different, where the souls of the people may be seen as it were in their countenances, and glisten in their eyes. Rom. i. 11, 12. Acts xi. 23.

3. If we do not make some progress in religion, we shall be *declining* and going backward. There is no standing still in this race, no intermission in this warfare. If we grow not in faith and love, the seeds of indifference and unbelief will spring up and grow in their stead; will choke the word, and render it unfruitful.

4. If we do not grow in grace, our religion will at best become *doubtful*, and we shall have cause to tremble for the issue. Heb. x. 38. It is the character of all true believers that they are making advancement in the divine life, and growing up in the image and likeness of God. Prov. iv. 18. 1 Pet. ii. 2. 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

If there be some who have neither faith nor love, and are utterly unconcerned about it; what must be said to such? We must go on preaching the gospel, warning them to flee from the wrath to come, and leave the consequences.

NATURE AND TENDENCY OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS.

For I bear them record, that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.—Romans x. 2, 3.

Zeal for God is rarely to be seen: men are zealous enough, but it is commonly about other things; or if it has religion for its object, it is too frequently employed for party purposes. What anxiety and what diligence do many discover in these matters, but who have no concern whatever for the glory of God. How painful, that out of the few who have a zeal for God, there should be some whose zeal is misdirected and utterly spurious.

The character of these zealots is drawn, as to their attainments; "I

bear them record that they have a zeal for God:" and yet it was of no account, or "not according to knowledge." What this means is declared in ver. 3. Hence we see that the highest attainments in religion, if accompanied with a self-righteous spirit, will oppose the righteousness of Christ, and so become deceptive and vain.

I. Examine the attainments of these Israelites, and see how far their zeal carried them.

1. It is supposed that they had great *privileges and advantages.* They were Israelites: to whom pertained the adoption, the giving of the law, and the covenants: and they valued themselves on that account. We also have as great or greater privileges than they, and yet they may come to nothing, and be worse than nothing to us.

2. They were not of the baser sort, but *decent, religious and devout.* There were others of a different description among them, but Paul is speaking of the religious and respectable part of the Jewish nation. Such were the Pharisees especially. And such manner of persons have we amongst us: they read and hear the word, are constant at public worship, and yet it may be all nothing.

3. They were not only religious, but *zealous in religion.* Such was Saul of Tarsus, and many others. In a variety of cases the virtue of some religionists is merely negative; their characters exhibit none of the grosser vices, and moreover they are quite in earnest in religion, taking great pains to be pious and devout, and to please God.

4. Their activity and earnestness is called *a zeal of God*, being concerned about the duties of religion. This kind of zeal is often mentioned in the second chapter of this epistle: it displayed itself in making their boast of God, and being the children of Abraham. It was their zeal for God also which made them refuse to honour Christ; 'Give God the praise, said they, this man is a sinner.' The same zeal led them at last to crucify the Saviour as a blasphemer.

5. It was such a zeal however as excited *the pity and the prayers of the apostle:* for this had been his own case. We also feel more for such persons than for others. To see a man earnest in religion, and sincere in a wrong cause, is very affecting; to see him toiling in a road that will lead him to destruction, the slave of a blind and superstitious zeal. This affected our Lord when he beheld the young ruler: he beheld, he loved, and pitied him. Thus also we shall feel, if we be like-minded.

Thus far we have seen what was apparently good in them: let us

II. Notice their great defect, and the fatal cause to which it is ascribed.

Their zeal was not according to knowledge, it was a self-righteous opposition to the only way of salvation, and of course it proved their ruin.

1. Observe *the origin* of a self-righteous spirit: "ignorance of God's righteousness," or of his righteous character as a Lawgiver.

The self-righteous are utterly blind to the spirituality and equity of the divine law, thinking it to extend only to outward actions, and therefore that they obey it, as far as can be expected in the present state. They think they do as well as they can, and have no idea of God's requiring the heart, and therfore have no conviction of their being such great sinners. They are 'alive without the law,' and therefore feel no need of a Saviour, and of a great one. The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. Such characters there were in the apostle's time, and there are multitudes of such amongst us.

We see here the importance of just sentiments of the law and the Lawgiver, as altogether fundamental to the gospel. 'I through the law am dead to the law,' said the apostle. Some indeed have passed over this part of divine truth, under pretence of preaching the gospel; as though that could be cordially received without the law, by which is the knowledge of sin. They will have nothing to do with Moses, they say: but if so, they can have nothing to do with Christ: for it is the great design of his undertaking to magnify the law, and to make it honourable.

2. *The evidence* of a self-righteous spirit is "going about to establish their own righteousness." As there is a wide difference between an attachment to the law, and to the works of the law; so there is also to God's righteousness, and to our own righteousness.

The object of these zealous Israelites was to establish "their own righteousness," as that on account of which they might be accepted and rewarded, or some way entitled to the divine favour.

Again, it is supposed that this building, this delusive system, is often beaten down, by temptations, by the failure of resolutions and promises; and then, like setting Dagon in his place again, they "go about to establish" and to fix it on the stump that is left behind. It is a circuitous course, altogether unlike to God's way of salvation, ver. 6. Tears, vows, penances, climbing up to heaven, and descending into the deep. What would the poor dying thief on the cross have done, if he had had such a journey to go, before he could be received into paradise!

3. *The consequences of it* with respect to the only way of salvation: "not submitting themselves unto the righteousness of God." Christ's righteousness is here called the righteousness of God, as in Phil. iii. 8. His obedience unto death is our only righteousness, or that for the sake of which we must be accepted. God bestows favours in reward of righteousness, to show his approbation of what is right. If man had been obedient, his works would have been rewarded; but now all is given us for the sake of Christ, in whom he is well pleased. He gives us salvation as a reward of his obedience: this is the way, and the only way in which it can be obtained.

The pride of human nature however is supposed to be such, that a sinner finds it hard to submit. Job's friends would feel mortified that they must be regarded only for his sake, Job xlii. 6, 8; and every sinner finds it difficult to give up every idea of personal worthiness, and to be ranked at once amongst the very chief of sinners; yet to this state of mind we must be brought, before we can cordially accept of a free salvation. 1 Tim. i. 15.

Many think they are willing to be saved, while in truth they cannot

be reconciled to God's way of salvation; and so are finally deceived, and finally lost.

We may learn from hence wherein much of the essence of true religion consists, namely, in a spirit of deep abasement, in the annihilation of self, and in being well pleased to be wholly indebted to Christ, and the riches of his grace, for the hope and assurance of eternal life.

DESPONDENCY PREVENTED BY THE RECOLLECTION OF PAST EXPERIENCE.

Oh my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermorites, from the hill Mizar.—Psalm xlii. 6.

It is good for us to be acquainted with the experience of God's people in former times. We shall find that many of them have passed through various trials, and been as much discouraged at times as we ourselves can be. Those who have now 'washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,' were such as 'came up out of great tribulation.' In the text we have a view of David sinking into despondency, and labouring under great discouragement: we see also in what way he sought relief under his distress.

"Jordan and Mizar" may refer to places whither he was driven by Saul, or by the rebellion of Absalom. If the psalm was written on the latter occasion, it probably refers to some places of emminent danger, and where the Lord appeared for his help. Or it may refer to some special seasons of divine enjoyment; and these he would remember, in order to relieve and comfort himself in the present distress.

We may learn from hence, that in seasons of great sorrow and trouble it is good for us to look back on past experience. Remembering the Lord's goodness to us in times past, tends not only to promote gratitude, but to excite hope, and strengthen our confidence in God. Two things must however be guarded against—

(1) That we do not look back on past experience in order to make ourselves happy without God, or contented in a lukewarm and backsliding state: this would be highly delusive and dangerous. David looked back in order to support his soul under present distress, and to encourage himself to hope again in the Lord.

(2) That we do not live on past experience, as the principal source of our comfort and joy. We are not to live upon ourselves, but upon Christ: not on our own comforts, but on his fulness. We are to make such a use of past experience as did the wife of Manoah, after the angel had appeared to her. 'If the Lord had meant to destroy us, said she, he would not have shown us such things as these.' It is with past experience as it is with present experience: the main comfort arising from it consists in what is connected with it, and that is, the enjoyment of

God. Hence the language of David is, I will remember "Thee" from the land of Jordan.

I. When depressed by temporal afflictions and difficulties, it is good to look back to former times, when we were delivered and carried through similar trials.

Few of our troubles are so great but we have been in as great before, and it would be well to remember this. Jacob did so, when he was going to meet Esau: he remembered the difficulties of his first setting out, and derived encouragement from it. Gen. xxxii. 10. Hence also the Lord reminded Israel of what he had done for them, Mic. vi. 5: and hence too, all the while they were meeting with difficulties in the way to Canaan, he addressed them as 'the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt.' When faint and weary in the way, it is good to remember the difficulies we have already overcome. In this spirit it was that David went forth against Goliah: 'The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.' Thus Paul also comforted his own mind in a season of great distress, 2 Cor. i. 10: and the minds of the Hebrews when they were ready to faint. Heb. x. 32.

II. Under depression of spirit on account of indwelling sin, it is of great use to look back on past conflicts and deliverances.

There are times when sin operates more sensibly and more powerfully than at others, and when the tempter employs his wiles with greater success. In such seasons the believer will feel much discouraged, and be ready to exclaim as David did: " Oh my God, my soul is cast down within me." At such times we are in danger of sinking into despondency, and of giving up the conflict, fearing that our opposition is all in vain. 'I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul:' also Psal. xl. 12, when David was dismayed by a host of spiritual enemies. But we should do well to remember that this is not the first time we have been engaged in the conflict. Remember how, by prayer, by humiliation, by watchfulness, thou hast formerly overcome, and upon the whole, hast kept the field to this day. Reflect on the strength of your corruptions, and the weakness of your graces, and you will have cause to wonder that you have held out thus far: is it not because the Lord alone has been your strength and your shield? 'Thou shalt not be afraid then of thine enemies, but shalt well remember what the Lord thy God did unto Pharaoh, and unto all Egypt.' Deut. vii. 18—19.

III. When discouraged by the apprehension lest we should finally miscarry, it is good sometimes to reflect that this is the case with many others as well as ourselves.

These fears may arise from a low and declining state of religion in the soul, and the prevalence of indwelling sin; or on the contrary, they may be the effect of sincere and unfeigned love to Christ. There is a

jealousy over ourselves which that love necessarily excites, a tender but not distressing fear of losing what above all things we most desire, considering especially the danger of self-deception, and the consequences that would follow. These fears however, though in a great degree salutary, may prevail too far, and weaken our hands and sadden our hearts in the ways of God. In this case it is good to look back if we can upon times past; the recollection of time and of places where God has appeared for us, will revive and strengthen our confidence in him. The Lord himself remembers the day of our espousals, and so should we. Jer. ii. 2. Jacob remembered Bethel, and was comforted; David remembered Jordan, and the hill Mizar; and Peter the holy mount. 2 Pet. i. 18.

IV. Under discouraging appearnces respecting the state of religion generally, it is good to look back on former and better times.

The interests of religion are seldom so low with us, but we may remember when they were much lower; and from time to time the Lord has often revived his own work. Psal. lxxxv. 6. Isai. li. 1, 2. If we look back to the history of the church, we shall find that God's people have met with greater difficulties and discouragements than any that we have ever seen, and there have been times when the state of human affairs has looked dark and threatening upon the interests of religion: yet the cloud has blown over, and the sun of prosperity has once more arisen upon the drooping church, and illumined a benighted world. Acts ix. 31.

REFLECTIONS.

(1) Under all our looking back, let it be with a view to our pressing forward; not to remain contented in a carnal state, or relax our diligence, but to furnish a stimulus to perseverance.

(2) Amidst our misgivings and jealousy of ourselves, let us encourage ourselves, in the Lord our God. Whatever changes there may be in us, there is none in him. If we are poor and needy, weak and helpless, there is a fulness in Christ which can never be exhausted.

(3) Let those who have no Bethels to remember, no past experience to refer to, be encouraged to come to Christ as they are, as perishing, ruined and undone. The way is still open, and you may find mercy.

CHRIST'S NATIVITY.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone around about them; and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.—Luke ii. 8—11.

In the circumstances attending the birth of Christ, we see much of the hand of God. The decree of Cæsar Augustus, which directed the Virgin mother to Bethlehem, is employed for the accomplishment of ancient prophecy: ver. 1—3. Mic. v. 2. The low and humble state in which the Saviour was born, ver. 7, serves as a specimen of the treatment he should meet with from the world in general, while the ministry of attendant angels indicated the honour which God would put upon him notwithstanding. John i. 10, 11.

Let us notice some of the particulars of the history, before we enter on the immediate subject of the text—

(1) Observe the interest which the *angels* felt on the occasion. The minds of men were wholly occupied with the 'taxing,' and the decree of the emperor; but *their* thoughts are full of Christ. The rulers and principal inhabitants of Jerusalem overlooked what had happened at Bethlehem, as scarcely deserving of regard, while the humble shepherds in the field are visited by an angel from heaven.

(2) Not only did an angel appear to them, but "the glory of the Lord shone round about them." Angels sometimes made their appearance in human form, as in the instance of Abraham and Lot; and then they excited no particular fear or dread. But on this occasion, so great and interesting, they appear in all their native dignity and glory, that it might be seen they brought a message immediately from God.

(3) The effect it had upon the shepherds: "they were sore afraid," but were afterwards cheered by the heavenly messenger. Mary Magdalene also was greatly alarmed at the appearance of the angel at the sepulchre; and as both these visions took place amidst the darkness of the night, it must have added a terrific grandeur to the scene. Yet in this awful manifestation of the divine glory, there is a mixture of tender mercy; and the shepherds are filled with fear and hope, a presentiment of the feelings which the gospel should inspire.

(4) The object proclaimed is the "Saviour." When an angel turns preacher he does not speak of himself, nor draw the attention to that quarter, but to Christ, as the supreme object of regard. What an example to all who engage in the sacred ministry!

(5) The good news was common to "all people," and not to one nation only. The highest and best source of consolation is that which is common to all christians, and consists in the common blessings of salvation; and not that which distinguishes one people or one christian

from another. David's principal desire, and also Paul's is equally the desire of all that truly believe. Psal. xxvii. 3. Phil. iii. 8.

(6) The good news, though common to all people, was more immediately addressed to the shepherds, who like many others were waiting for the Consolation of Israel. "To you" is born a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. The gospel also is as much addressed to individuals, as if they only were the objects of it.

(7) In this heavenly message particular attention is paid to time, place, and other circumstances, to show their agreement with ancient prophecy: ver. 11. Not an angel from heaven must be permitted to speak any thing contrary to what is written in the Scriptures of truth. Gal. i. 8.

I. Consider the subject of the angelic message, and see what "good tidings" are contained in it.

1. The *birth of Jesus Christ* was itself good news. This was the great object of prophecy from the beginning of the world, and the hope of the church in all ages. Zion was bid to rejoice in it, Zech. ix. 9; and the whole creation to be glad, Psal. xcvi. God was now manifest in the flesh, even Immanuel, God with us. The Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us, the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

2. The *gracious design* of his incarnation imported good tidings to a guilty and ruined world. He came to do the will of God, to die as a ransom for us, to rise from the dead, to ascend into heaven, and make intercession for us. The Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil, to bring glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good will to men.

3. The *way of salvation*, which was effected by the coming of Christ, forms an essential part of the good tidings brought to us by the angel. To us is born "a Saviour," which is Christ the Lord. Repentance and remission of sins are now preached among all nations; a free, full, and eternal salvation. These in effect are the tidings announced by the celestial messenger.

II. These tidings are matter of joy, "of great joy to all people."

The term here employed is strong, and never used but on great occasions; for the joy of harvest, or an important victory; but is fully applicable to the subject under consideration.

1. The coming of Christ was the joy of *the old-testament church*, while they lived only in the hope of this great event. Isai. xxv. 9. John viii. 56. How much more when it is fully realised.

2. All the joy of believers, *during the lifetime of our Saviour*, centred entirely in him. Mary and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna, and all that looked for redemption in Jerusalem, rejoiced and triumphed in the incarnation, when they saw the mercy promised to the fathers, and the performance of the holy covenant. Christ was the joy of his immediate disciples and followers, and his presence the only happiness they knew on earth.

3. All the joy *in the times of the apostles*, had an immediate reference to Christ and his salvation. Jerusalem, which had been the scene of his deepest abasement, was afterwards filled with peace, and joy, and gladness, and resounded with the triumphs of the ascended Saviour. There was great joy also in the city of Samaria, but it was through the doctrine of the cross. The apostles triumphed in every place, but it was because the savour of his name was spread abroad. Whom having not seen, says Peter, ye love: in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

4. Christ and his salvation made all their *troubles and sorrows light and momentary;* yea they counted not their lives dear for his sake. The history of the primitive church is a history of sufferings in the cause of Christ, and of joy and rejoicing in his holy name. This also is the way for us to bear up under all the sorrows of the present life.

III. Enquire what is necessary to render these good tidings a matter of real joy to us.

It is an undoubted fact, that they do not produce joy in all. They did not then, and they do not now. Many think the tidings of the gospel not worth hearing. Many who hear, neglect them, or feel no interest in them. Some who seem to rejoice for a time become indifferent; and afterwards wither away.

To become the subject of real joy, these tidings require to be believed as true, and to be received with the utmost cordiality. Christ was in the world, and the world knew him not; he came unto his own, and his own received him not. Those who did receive him were such as believed on his name, being born again.

In particular, it includes a deep conviction of our guilty, lost, and ruined state, which is pre-supposed by the gospel; and which must be felt and realized, before it can convey to us tidings of great joy.

Also a cordial reception of the gospel itself, as revealing the only way of salvation; obeying it from the heart, and receiving the truth in love.

CHRIST'S FITNESS FOR UNIVERSAL EMPIRE.

And the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counseller, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.—Isaiah ix. 6.

This chapter contains many glorious promises of the coming and kingdom of the Lord Messiah, and each of them is expressive of the blessed effects that would follow upon his appearance, and upon his accession to the throne of David.

(1) He is represented as rising like the sun upon a dark world: ver. 2. Luke i. 79.

(2) The church is greatly to increase under his reign, which is to be a season of joy and gladness: ver. 3.

(3) His conquests should be great and wonderful, like that of Gideon over the ancient Midianites: ver. 4.

(4) Great peace and tranquility should attend his reign, and instruments of war be committed to the flames: ver. 5.

(5) The reason of all this is taken from the extraordinary character of the Messiah, as possessing every human and divine perfection: ver. 6.

(6) The general description of his government is such that it far exceeds every other government upon earth, in the purity of its administration, and in the perpetuity of its existence: ver. 7.

Three things may be observed in the words of the text—(1) The "government" committed to Christ is government in the absolute form. The Father loveth the Son, and hath committed "all things" into his hand, all power in heaven and in earth; he is head over all things for the church, and exalted as the Lord of all—(2) The government being "upon his shoulder," implies that there is a ponderous weight of care in government itself, whether domestic, civil, or religious; much more in the superintendence of that empire over which Christ is the supreme and the only Lord.—(3) The expression implies that the whole burden of government lies upon Christ alone, to the exclusion of every other. But few governors or rulers are willing to take the burden upon themselves; they are for leaving that to others. Christ however would not do this; we may therefore be assured that his government is well administered.

I. Enquire wherein consists the weight of Christ's government, that it requires to be laid "upon his shoulder."

1. It arises from its *boundless extent*. The charge of a family, especially of a numerous one, is a weighty concern. The charge of a congregation is still more so; hence an apostle speaks of the care of all the churches coming upon him daily, as involving a very high degree of responsibility. The government of a vast empire, where its subjects, its interests, and its enemies are diverse and numerous, is an important undertaking, and brings with it a load of care. But oh to think of the amazing, the incalculable interests of Christ's kingdom! The whole church is under his care; he is the chief Shepherd and Bishop of souls. The whole world, the whole universe, is under his government and direction; the weight of all is upon his shoulder, and he manages the whole without trusting to another.

2. The *number of his enemies*, and their restless designs against him, add to the difficulty and importance of such a government. The kingdom of Christ has many enemies, both within and without, and they are ever seeking to overturn it. It is a great concern to have the charge of an earthly kingdom, so as to be able to counteract, and to frustrate the designs of all its enemies. But Christ's cause is opposed on every hand, and the hearts of men are fully set against it. It is at-

tacked by the advocates of error, by the arms of persecution; it is betrayed by false brethren, and the gates of hell are trying to prevail against it. When Elijah thought himself left alone at a time of general revolt, he fainted under his burden, and left his work in despair. But Christ has the government of all in his own hands, and he will neither fail nor be discouraged. Isai. xlii. 4.

3. The *uncertainty of the life of his servants*, gives additional weight to the concerns of his kingdom. Christ's best friends, who are most concerned for the success of his cause, live only a little while, as too many affecting instances show, in the death of eminent ministers and useful missionaries. The fathers, where are they; and the prophets do they live for ever? While they live they care for his cause and seek to promote it. When they die it seems almost as if things could not go on without them, and we are ready to exclaim as Elisha did on the ascension of his predecessor, 'My father, my father! The chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!' Yet it is well to remember that all the care and management of Christ's kingdom rests upon his shoulder, and that he alone is sufficient.

4. The various and continual *wants of his subjects*, is another important consideration. In this view there is a great weight on many of his faithful servants, whose work it is to feed the church of God, and to give to every one their meet in due season. But the care of all lies upon Christ: and oh how large the family for which he has to provide, and how boundless the wants which he has to supply.

5. The danger there is of some of his professed *friends and followers forsaking him*, and abandoning the cause which they formerly espoused, being carried away by error or temptation. It is affecting to see those of whom we hoped better things turning aside, and following the Lord no more; and too frequently our admonitions and entreaties in such cases are unavailing. But while the government is on his shoulder all is safe, let the unfaithfulness of men be what it may.

II. The eminent qualifications which Christ possesses for the management of his vast empire.

These are such as become the government which he assumes: the whole weight is laid on him, and he is well able to bear it. In the management of earthly kingdoms it is desirable that rulers should be eminently qualified; that they should excel in wisdom and discernment, possess a capacity for prompt and vigorous management; especially that they be just, ruling in the fear of God. 2 Sam. xxiii. 3. But every requisite qualification is possessed by Christ in a supereminent degree.

1. Observe the *singularity of his character:* "his name shall be called Wonderful." There was something wonderful in the person of Saul the first king of Israel; he was of surprising stature, being head and shoulders higher than all the people, the emblem of superior dignity. The extremes which meet in the person of Christ are also wonderful, his dignity and abasement; "a child born, and yet the mighty God;" he came into the world poor and destitute, yet occupies

the seat of universal empire; he is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and the Lamb in the midst of the throne; of the seed of Abraham according to the flesh, and yet over all, God blessed for ever. Such singular and pre-eminent attributes are the signal of a most exalted destiny, as well as the preparatives for a station at the head of the universe.

2. The *depth of his wisdom* as the "Counsellor," is another qualification for sustaining the weight that is laid upon his shoulder. Christ knows all the cases of his subjects, all the designs of his enemies, and is able to provide for every exigency. He is of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord, and knows how to speak a word to him that is weary. He can comfort the afflicted, succour the tempted, and say to them that are of a faithful heart be strong. He can bid defiance to all his foes, can turn their counsel into foolishness, or convert them into friends.

3. He is not only wonderful in counsel, but *mighty in working*, for he is "the mighty God." The affairs of his kingdom require that he should be omnipresent, nor less that he should be omnipotent. No power short of that which is almighty would be able to subdue the hearts of men, and to bring every thought into obedience to Christ; hence in his conquests, in the conversion of sinners to himself, he is styled 'Most Mighty.' Psal. xlv. 3. cx. 3. No power short of this would be sufficient: this also is the comfort of his servants, and that alone which ensures their success. Acts. xi. 21. 2 Cor. x. 4.

4. His *tender mercy* is equal to his majesty and might, for he is "the everlasting Father." It is the glory of a prince to be the father of his people: some are so for a time, and are then removed by death: but Christ is the "everlasting" Father. Moses, while king in Jeshurun, was as a nursing father to Israel; but he had such a weight of care upon him that he was ready to faint under the burden. Num. xi. 11, 12. But Jesus has already borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, as well as borne our sins in his own body on the tree; and he continues to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He is able to save to the uttermost, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us: and though the fathers and the prophets, and the friends of Jesus die, yet 'the Lord liveth, and blessed be my Rock.'

5. Another eminent qualification is, *the pacific character* of this ruler as "the Prince of Peace." Earthly kings and princes often disturb the peace of the world for the gratification of their ambition, and the love of conquest: but Christ seeks the prosperity and the happiness of all his subjects. Having made peace by the blood of his cross, his is become a kingdom of righteousness, of peace, and of joy in the Holy Ghost. The extension of his government will be the diffusion of peace over all the earth, and the nations shall learn war no more.

(1) This subject speaks joy to all the friends of true religion. If the government be upon Christ's shoulder, his cause must finally prevail. 1 Cor. xv. 25.

(2) It speaks terror to all his enemies. You must submit, or be overcome. Psal. ii. 12.

(3) Let it lead to the enquiry, whose we are, and whom do we serve? Rom. vi. 16.

PRAISE FOR PARDONING MERCY.

Oh Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.—Psal. li. 15.

The force and beauty of many passages of Scripture arise from the occasion on which they were delivered. Such language as that before us, if viewed out of its connection, would appear to convey the idea only of a desire to enjoy freedom in prayer and praise. But considered as a part of this penitential psalm, it implies much more, and requires additional force and interest. It implies that sin had shut the mouth of the penitent, and he knew not how to open it; but if God would pardon his iniquity, that would open it, and then his lips should ever be employed in praise.

I. Enquire in what respects sin may be said to shut the mouth.

In general it produces a sense of guilt and shame, of fear and dread; and this closes up the lips. Light or common troubles may make men noisy in their griefs and lamentations, but those which pierce the soul are like the deep waters that give no sound. 'I am so troubled,' said the Psalmist, 'that I cannot speak:' lxxvii. 4. Job, in the depth of his affliction, kept silence several days; and our blessed Lord, in the season of his greatest trouble, spoke but little. Job ii. 13. John xiv. 30. But if outward troubles have this effect, much more those which are spiritual.

More particularly—

1. Sin shuts the mouth in our *private approaches to God*, and is a bar to all freedom. When overwhelmed with guilt and shame, the psalmist calls it 'roaring' and 'groaning,' rather than prayer, there being none of that sacred and satisfying intercourse with heaven which the believer seeks. Psal. xxxviii. 8, 9. It is generally thus, under our *first* convictions of sin, and alarms of conscience; and it is so afterwards, when we have a sense of fresh contracted guilt. To be enlarged in prayer is to 'open the mouth wide, that the Lord may fill it;' but it is not so, when the soul is bowed down under a load of guilt. Psal. lxxxi. 10. cxliii. 7. We are then 'shut up, and cannot come forth.' Psal. lxxxviii. 8.

2. A sense of guilt will *prevent our speaking for God*, as well as our communion with him. David had been accustomed to speak much on God's behalf, and to open his dark sayings upon the harp; but during his fall his lips were closed in silence. Conscious of his own misdeeds, he was unable to reprove the ungodly as he had used to do, and was constrained to keep silence before them. Psal. xxxviii. 13, 14. Shimei might now curse, and the penitent would have nothing to answer. Prov. xxv. 26. Thus also it is with us when we have sinned against the Lord: our mouth is shut, lest reproofs and admonitions should be retorted upon us: 'Physician heal thyself.' Rom. ii. 22, 23. There is no recommending religion to others that will avail, unless we ourselves give an exemplification of it in our own deportment. But if

David be restored, 'then,' says he, 'will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee:' ver. 13.

II. Observe how it is that forgiveness opens the mouth in prayer and praise.

It is a matter of fact that it does so, whether we refer to our first experience of forgiving mercy or afterwards. Even the *hope* of forgiveness opens the mouth in prayer, as is evident from the whole of this penitential psalm. The language of the publican in the parable, and of the thief on the cross, is also to the same effect. But while the hope of mercy opens the mouth in prayer, a *sense* of divine forgiveness will fill the lips with praise; and this is what David wanted.

1. Forgiveness furnishes *matter for praise* and thankfulness. It puts a new song into our mouth, even of salvation to our God. On this subject it is almost impossible to be silent. 'Come, and I will tell you what the Lord hath done for my soul,' is the language of the pardoned sinner. Of the woman that wept at the feet of Jesus it is said, She loved much because much had been forgiven her: and great love will open both the heart and the mouth for God.

2. Forgiveness *enlarges the soul,* and fits it for the work of praise. Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee, Matt. ix. 2; and this it was that afterwards filled the lips of David with unutterable praise, Psal. xxxii. 1, 2. To be forgiven is to be in a state of peace and reconciliation with God; and in this state, joy and rejoicing are perfectly becoming. We can then bear up under the ills of life, and rejoice even in tribulation. Without this, cheerfulness is folly and madness, a presumption for which there is no name. Without forgiveness, death and judgment are awful, eternity tremendous: but if accepted with God, all these are divested of their terrors.

III. The grateful return which a pardoned sinner should be concerned to make; when his mouth is opened, let him "show forth God's praise."

Many are desirous of pardoning mercy in order to escape punishment; but the object of a genuine penitent is, that he may glorify the Lord. Simon Magus prayed to be forgiven, but his heart was not right in the sight of God. David also prayed to be forgiven, but it was that he might praise the Lord. The penitent and pardoned sinners of Jerusalem were continually in the temple, praising God, and having favour with all the people. Acts ii. 47. Such will be concerned to speak well of his holy name, and to encourage others to put their trust in him. Psal. cxvi.

1. Praise is the *least return* that we can make for so great a blessing. When deeply afflicted with a sense of guilt and unworthiness, we have thought, what would we give to be delivered from the curse, and to be accepted of the Lord! Yet he asks not for burnt offerings, nor sin offerings, nor any other painful or expensive sacrifice. He only demands the homage of our hearts, and the sacrifice of our lips. Hos. xiv. 2. 1 Pet. ii. 5.

2. Praise for pardoning mercy *is due to God only.* David shed many tears, but he makes no mention of them: he was indebted to grace only for his forgiveness, and to God alone he gives the glory. Thus Paul, and all that have believed to the saving of the soul. Ephes. i. 7. 1 Tim. i. 15.

3. More praise is due for pardoning mercy than for all the blessings of this life, because it is greater than all, and comprehensive of all the rest. Rom. viii. 32. Appeal to the conscience of an awakened sinner, to a sinner in the arms of death, in what manner he forms the estimate, or whether he can entertain an idea of the least comparison. What are riches, thrones, or empires, in the view of eternal life! "Oh Lord, open thou my lips: and my mouth shall show forth thy praise."

NATURE AND NECESSITY OF DIVINE GUIDANCE.

✔ *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.*—Psalm lxxiii. 24.

If a traveller had lost his way, and some kind friend had found him amidst dangers, and set him right; he would be anxious for his assistance and direction, during the remainder of his journey. The writer of this psalm had sadly erred, and gone out of his way. The counsel of God had been the means of bringing him back, and setting him right: he therefore now resolves to give himself up to it all the future part of his life, in the fullest confidence that it would lead him right, and land him safe at last.

There is a great fulness in the expressions used by the psalmist. They are like another passage of the same writer: 'The Lord will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.' The text contains all that we can possibly desire—a heaven in reserve, and a guide to the possession of it.

I. Consider the necessity of divine guidance.

The term is figurative, yet sufficiently clear and impressive. We can easily conceive of a pilgrim travelling to a strange land, through unknown paths, and often perplexed about the way; of God condescending to perform the part of a guide, 'leading the blind by a way that they knew not, and in paths that they had not known.'

There are in particular four things that make this guidance necessary—

1. Our *natural ignorance* of spiritual things, and of the path that leads to eternal life. No one ever found the way to heaven of his own accord. The heathen world, even the wisest of them, were like the men about Lot's house, after the angel had smitten them with blindness. They knew they had sinned, and were the subjects of an

accusing conscience; but did not know how sin could be forgiven, how they might obtain the divine favour, nor how to please God by any of their services. They laboured to do all by ceremonies which were abominable; they lived in darkness, and in darkness they died. They knew not whence they came, nor whither they were going.

Such also would be our state, but for the counsel that God has given us. Yet there are sceptics and unbelievers who would persuade us to forsake our guide, to trust to the light of nature, and lean to our own understanding. But compare the wisest of these men with the weakest believer, who has committed his soul into the hands of Christ in a dying hour. John xiv. 4. 2 Tim. i. 12.

2. The *many by-paths* which present themselves to our view, and the multitudes who walk in them, render the presence of a guide necessary.

The generality of mankind are walking according to the course of this world, in the old beaten road of their ancestors, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and these have their allurements to draw us aside from the narrow way which leadeth unto life.

There is greater danger still from the many ways which profess to lead to heaven, but which in reality do not. Multitudes are going in the way of self-righteousness, depending on their own works for acceptance with God. There is scarcely any evil, or any error, in which some who appeared to be good men have not walked; and the danger from their example is extreme. Every system that tends to depreciate the Saviour, that lessens in any degree the importance of his mediation, or that would substitute speculative notions of any kind in the place of practical and experimental piety, is a departure from the true way of salvation, and leads to endless perdition.

3. The propensity there is in us *to turn aside*, is another consideration that renders a guide necessary. The flesh wants to find an easier path than that which is marked out: the way of truth and of holiness is uncongenial, full of difficulty and self-denial. The candidate would wish if possible to reconcile Christ and the world, Christ and Belial; would spare a little sin, because it is a little one; and would like to divide the honour of salvation between Christ and himself.

It is from hence that such multitudes are deceived with a form of godliness, and are ever deviating from the narrow way which leadeth unto life. Oh Lord, thou shalt guide me with thy counsel!

4. *The importance* of being found in the right way, and holding out to the end, bespeak the necessity of divine direction and support.

If once we get wrong, the farther we go the farther we are off. All we do is nothing, and worse than nothing. In other deviations the consequence may not be very serious; here it is absolutely fatal. If we forsake our guide, we fall, and may never rise any more.

II. The medium by which this guidance is effected: "with thy counsel."

Men of every description have felt the need of *counsel*, on various occasions, in civil and political affairs, David had Ahitophel for his counseller. Rehoboam had his old men and his young men about him, as his principal advisers.

Men have also felt their need of *divine* counsel in reference to their spiritual and eternal interests. Hence the heathen consulted their oracles, though but lying vanities. In opposition to all these, and to all the wisdom of this world, God undertakes to be the guide of all those who put their trust in him.

The Lord has guided many of his servants in an *extraordinary* way, before his written word was given; by direct communications from heaven, through the ministry of angels, or by dreams and visions. He now guides his people by *ordinary* means, by his providence, or by his written word. These are the pillar and cloud to Israel, while passing through the wilderness.

1. Observe how the Lord guides us *by his word*, or "counsel." Under this guidance *we see our way*, and the path is plainly marked out before us. Do I want to know what I must do to be saved? I am told: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. Am I tempted to doubt of the truth of God's word, amidst the fluctuations of human opinion? Hear what the Lord hath said, and let that suffice. Do I entertain hard thoughts of his dealings with me. Let me repair to the santuary, and there I shall see reason to loathe myself before him. Am I in danger of turning aside to some evil way? What says the counsel of God? How is it written? Thus it was that our Lord repelled the adversary. Matt. iv. Consult the word of God as you would a map of the road, or a chart on a dangerous voyage. In all questions of truth and error, keep to this: What saith the Scriptures? In all questions of right and wrong do the same. Never attempt to be wise above what is written; but let him guide you with "his counsel."

2. Observe how the Lord guides us *by his providence*, which is another part of his "counsel." Here we do *not always see our way*. A wise and inscrutable providence becomes our guide in many cases where we have no plain directions in Scripture, according to that promise, 'I will guide thee with mine eye.' Psal. xxxii. 8. In general our own eye is made to be our guide, but there are many cases in which we cannot see our way before us; but God's eye can penetrate the thickest maze, and explore the most intricate path. Providence often gives a direction to things, equal to that of good counsel. Hence it is that one is guided by a series of events to attend upon the ministry of the gospel, or is brought into some religious family; another is led out of some great and inexplicable difficulties; another falls into certain troubles which threaten to overwhelm him, but they prove blessings in the end, like the going down of Joseph and his brethren into Egypt—and all this is of Him, who is wonderful in counsel, and mighty in working.

III. The happy issue of surrendering ourselves up to this guidance: "thou shalt afterwards receive me to glory."

If you follow the counsel of the foolish, that will lead you to disgrace and misery. If you follow the counsel of the world, that may lead to the acquisition of a little wealth, or it may not; but that is all. If in

religious matters you are guided by mere human speculation, it will lead you into a maze of uncertainty. But God's counsel and guidance will lead us to "glory." There is no finding this way but by following his direction, and think what this hope is in a dying hour!

Thou shalt "receive me to glory." This stands opposed to the end of the wicked, who are plunged into endless perdition, and reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of that great day.

1. We may infer from hence, that old-testament saints not only believed in a future state of happiness or misery, but that it would immediately take place after death. A moment brought the destruction of the wicked, and ushered the righteous into a state of bliss. On their departure out of this world, they called upon God to receive their spirit. Psal. xxxi. 5.

2. The heavenly state is called "glory," as being an assemblage of all that is great and good. The term is descriptive of the state of a conqueror; and such is the state of every true believer. To him that overcometh, saith Christ, will I grant to sit upon my throne. They are made kings and priests unto God and the Father, and shall reign for ever and ever.

Glory is a rest from our pilgrimage, a home when we quit this earthly house of our tabernacle, a feast after the labours of life are ended. The great Shepherd that dwelleth in the midst of his flock shall feed them, and lead them to living fountains of water.

It is a glory that will eclipse all former glory, and for ever annihilate all former misery: sorrow and sighing shall flee away. All other glory is shadowy and vain: this is real and substantial, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

3. Those who have followed God's counsel shall be received into it with an abundant entrance, and on their arrival shall be welcomed by all the inhabitants of heaven.

HEZEKIAH'S PASSOVER.

Then the priests the levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven.—2 Chronicles xxx. 27.

In this chapter we have a pleasing account of the revival of religion under the reign of Hezekiah, son of the wicked and idolatrous Ahaz, in whose time the house of God was shut up, aud the very doors of the temple were suffered to fall into decay: chap. xxix. 3—7. We may here remark the following particulars—

(1) It was to the honour of Hezekiah that immediately on his accession, 'in the first year and in the first month after his reign,' he opened the house of the Lord and repaired it, even before the coronation cere-

mony was over; making the divine glory his first object, and the honour which belonged to himself subordinate: xxix. 3.

(2) He next assembled the levites, and delivered to them a fatherly address: ver. 4—11.

This was attended with a salutary effect: in eight days the levites were consecrated, and they cleansed the sanctuary: ver. 17.

(3) Hezekiah then proceeded to offer a sin-offering, or an atonement for the nation, which had so long and so awfully departed from the Lord, and cast contempt upon his ordinances: ver. 21.

(4) In this atonement he kindly included the remnant of the ten tribes, though they had rejected the house of David his father. This was a sweet instance of forgiveness: ver. 24.

(5) Having offered a sacrifice of atonement, he presents a thank-offering, as an expression of gratitude and praise to God; and this free-will offering was very abundant: ver. 31—35.

(6) Honourable mention is made of the levites, who were more ready to this good work than the priests, few of whom had prepared themselves for the service: ver. 34.

After Hezekiah had presented a sacrifice of atonement, accompanied with thank-offerings, he resolved on keeping the Passover; on which a few additional remarks may be offered—

(1) We see that all Israel were invited to the Passover, not excepting the ten tribes: xxx. 5—10.

(2) By some the invitation is treated with contempt, as is the invitation to a greater passover; yet some humble themselves and come: ver. 10—12. Matt. xxii. 4, 5.

(3) In Judah there was a great unanimity and oneness of heart: ver. 12.

(4) Hezekiah intercedes for those who had committed an error in seeking the Lord, and not keeping the ordinances as they had been delivered unto them: ver. 17—20.

(5) Honourable mention is again made of the levites, and of their zeal for the Lord: ver. 22.

(6) So cordial were they in this sacred festival, that they prolonged it seven days beyond the usual time: ver. 23.

The whole of this pleasing history is concluded in the words of the text. "Then the priests the levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven."

It is to be hoped that many of us are in the habit of praying to the Lord, for this is the character of every one that is godly. Let us beware however that we do not rest in a form, or feel satisfied with the deed done; but let our great concern be, that our prayer may come up with acceptance to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven.

I. Notice a few things respecting the prayer alluded to in the text, by which we may account for its coming up with acceptance before God.

It is not a little interesting to examine into this matter, inasmuch as it may teach us what is necessary to acceptable prayer.

1. It was *preceded by sacrifice.* It was not till the atonement was made, not till the pascal lamb was slain, that God accepted the prayer of the congregation of Israel. Surely this may teach us that all our prayers must be offered up in faith, or in the name of Jesus, our passover who is sacrificed for us. The prayer of sinners could not be heard but for his sake; and any that is not presented in his name, is an abomination to the Lord. This is one reason why the prayer of the wicked is so offensive in his sight; why the prayers of the pharisees, and the offerings of Cain could not be accepted. They all overlook the necessity of a Mediator, and of an atoning sacrifice, and are founded in the awful presumption of personal worthiness. While on the contrary, it is the intercession of Christ alone that gives acceptance to our prayers, and that only on behalf of those who come unto God 'by him.' John xiv. 6. Heb. vii. 25.

2. The prayer was *preceded by the confession of sin:* ver. 22. There can be no acceptable prayer while sin is unlamented and unconfessed. Psal. xxxii. 4, 5. 1 John i. 9. If sin be regarded, though it be only in the heart, the Lord will not hear us. Psal. lxvi. 18.
This will apply to us, both as a congregation, and as individuals. If any evil be cherished or connived at, all our prayers will be offered in vain. But when an open confession is made without reserve, as in the instance before us, we may hope that even our prayers will come up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven.

3. It was also *preceded by reformation.* It is not enough to confess iniquity, if we do not forsake it. The people of Israel forsook their former sins and idolatries, and that with all their hearts.
Let us then enquire how it is with us, and whether there can be any thing to prevent the acceptance of our prayers. Has the world its proper place with us? Do we mortify the deeds of the body, and deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts? Do we live in peace and love one with another; or are there jealousies and antipathies still remaining in our hearts? Do we live in the neglect of sacred ordinances, or do we love them? Is there no self-seeking motive in what we do, or do we serve the Lord with a perfect heart and a willing mind? Do we draw near to God in private, or are we living without God in the world?

4. Their prayer was accompanied with *a good degree of brotherly love:* they were "of one heart." The priests the levites "blessed the people," or implored the divine favour on their behalf. This included the forgetting of all former antipathies between Judah and Israel, and the forgiveness of all personal injuries or offences, and a covering all with the mantle of love. If we be selfish, and care not for others; or implacable in our resentments towards those who have offended us, even though they have indicated some contrition; the Lord will not hear us. This we have expressly from the mouth of our Saviour. Mark xi. 25, 26. Acceptable prayer also includes great oneness of heart in the exercise; and where this prevails it affords much hope of success. Matt. xviii. 19. The Lord loves to honour social prayer, for the encouragement of brotherly love and unity, and to put honour upon a disinterested spirit.

II. Observe the manner in which the acceptance of this prayer is expressed: "Their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven."

The terms are figurative, but highly expressive. God "hears" all prayer, so as to know what is presented at his footstool; but the text means his so hearing as to regard it, and delight in it. It also denotes God's hearing so as to answer prayer, and to grant what is requested at his hands. And when it is said that their prayer "came up" to his holy dwelling place, the allusion is to the ascending up of the incense from off the altar, which was so grateful in the sight of God. Psal. cxli. 2. Rev. viii. 3, 4.

We may here remark,

1. It is truly wonderful that God should condescend to hear and regard *the prayers of sinful men.* Some indeed have imagined it to be almost incredible, that the Supreme Being should concern himself with us and our affairs; and hence have said, like those of old, 'What profit is there if we should pray unto him?' And even some who affect the exclusive appellation of 'rational christians,' have been known to call in question the propriety of this essential part of true devotion. Others of an opposite character have been so oppressed and overwhelmed with a sense of sin and unworthiness, that they have feared it would be presumption in them to think that God would hear their prayer, and attend to the voice of their weeping. Even good men in a desponding state of mind, have been apt to think that all their prayers are offered in vain. Psal. xlii. lxvii. Too many of our prayers are also offered in unbelief, without the expectation of being heard.

2. Yet it is a delightful truth, that *God does really hear prayer.* We have abundant proof of this in the history of the church in all ages, and we are not without sufficient evidence in our own times. The passage therefore which we have been considering, affords great encouragement to prayer, especially to united and solemn prayer and supplication by the whole church, and also to individual believers.

SALVATION BY GRACE ALONE.

By the grace of God I am what I am.—1 Corinthians xv. 10.

If any one had reason to boast, it was surely the apostle Paul. Few men had made such proficiency in human learning, or were indulged with such tokens of the divine favour. But few, if any of the apostles, had laboured so abundantly, or with so much success. Yet he is willing to become nothing, that Christ may be all. He remembers what he once was, and is confounded: he considers what he now is, and is thankful: ver. 9, 10.

Two questions arise out of this subject:—What was Paul—and whence does it appear that he was indebted to the grace of God for his present state and condition.

I. Enquire what was Paul, or what his real state and condition.

He himself does not say what he was, but leaves it implied, while he ascribes it all to the grace of God. Some exception however must be taken, seeing there were several things in the life and character of Paul which do not admit of this unlimited ascription. For example—

He was *a sinner*, being by nature a child of wrath, even as others. He had also been a violent persecutor, breathing out threatenings and slaughters against the church of God: but all this arose from another cause, opposite to that mentioned in the text.

He was also *a creature of God:* but though this is ascribable to the power and wisdom and goodness of God, yet strictly speaking, not to his grace. Grace is free undeserved favour, and always supposes the previous existence and utter unworthiness of its object.

Paul was once *a Pharisee*, highly zealous for the law, excelling in the Jew's religion: and as concerning the law itself, he accounted himself blameless. Phil. iii. 6. This however was not attributable to the grace of God, but to his educational prejudices.

He was likewise *a scholar*, possessed of eminent attainments; was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and became one of the disputers of this world. But though his great proficiency in oratory and in literature might be owing to creative wisdom, and providential goodness, it could not with propriety be ascribed to that grace which bringeth salvation.

That which is ascribed to grace must be confined to the character which he sustained, from the time of his becoming *a subject of grace.* In other words, it respects his being a Christain, a Minister, and an Apostle of Christ.

In applying the subject to ourselves, for our individual instruction and benefit, it will be necessary to enquire what we *are*, if we be converted, in contradistinction from what we once *were*, and should still have been but for the grace of God.

1. We were *ignorant of the only true God*, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. Notwithstanding the means of instruction and of religious improvement which we enjoyed, we knew nothing as we ought to know, nor did we like to retain God in our knowledge. But now, if we have been truly converted to God, we have seen him, and do know him. He hath given us an understanding, that we might know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. 1 John v. 20. We were once blind, but now we see: were once darkness, but are now made light in the Lord. We may not be able to boast of human learning like Paul, nor be possessed of so much spiritual knowledge as he was: but if we know enough of Christ to make us love him, and to humble ourselves in the dust before him, we may hope that we have been made partakers of the grace of God in truth.

2. We were *enemies to God by wicked works*, even enmity itself. Rom. viii. 7. Such was Paul, and such were we. God was

not in all our thoughts, nor did we desire the knowledge of his ways. We were full of activity, but dead to God, and dead in sin. We loved pleasure, but were averse to the joys of the gospel; delighted in society, but not in fellowship with God, and with his people. But it is not so now: if we are christians, old things have passed away, and all things are become new. Of the Saviour we can now say, 'Thy name is as ointment poured forth. One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and enquire in his temple.'

3. We were *in the broad road that leadeth to destruction*, each in his own way, some in this course and some in that, but all walking according to the course of this world. Now, if we have embraced the gospel, we are in the narrow path that leadeth unto life. We are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. We were once afar off, but are now made nigh; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ Jesus. We live in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began. In the present life we are subject indeed to the common lot of all men, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but God hath already forgiven us all trespasses, and justified us freely by his grace: and we know that when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Besides this, Paul was a *Minister*, and an *Apostle* of Christ: and what he was in this respect will apply to us in different degrees. Not that we are apostles, nor all pastors and teachers; but God hath given us gifts severally as he will, and what we are in this respect we are by the grace of God. Paul accounted it great grace that he was put into the ministry, to preach among the gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. Ephes. iii. 8. 2 Tim. i. 12.

More particularly, there were several things in Paul's character and conduct which we must briefly notice:

(1) His singular *diligence*, for he laboured more abundantly than all the apostles. Yet he was not disposed to ascribe this to himself; but by "the grace of God," says he, "I am what I am." If we possess any measure of the same spirit, let us not boast, but ascribe it also to the same distinguishing grace and mercy. Besides, what are all our labours, compared with his!

(2) His *perseverance* in the work, notwithstanding the persecutions and the difficulties he had to meet with. When stoned, and taken up for dead, he went on with his work, as soon as he revived, as if nothing had happened to him. 2 Cor. xi. 23—28. Most men would have ascribed all this to natural fortitude and courage, but Paul ascribes it to quite another cause, as we see in the text before us.

(3) Paul was eminently *successful* in his work, as well as diligent and laborious. His preaching in every place was made the power of God unto salvation, and a savour of the name of Christ was spread abroad. 2 Cor. ii. 14. In our little success we are apt to be elated, but let us remember him who, while employed in subduing thousands to the obedience of Christ, felt that he himself was nothing, and that Christ was all in all. 1 Co. iii. 5—7.

II. Enquire whence it appears that "by the grace of God," Paul was what he was, both as a Christian and as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus.

1. He would *never have become a Christian* of his own accord merely, but would have gone on from bad to worse, till his end had been destruction. Nor did any one ever become such, merely of his own will. It is by the grace of God, and by that alone in the strictest sense. Not that we need the Holy Spirit only, to aid our endeavours to repent and believe the gospel, or that his assistance is rendered effectual by the efforts of our own will; but repentance and faith are so entirely the product of divine grace, that they have no existence whatever without it. Those who believe on the name of Jesus, are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. John i. 12, 13. The account which Paul gives of his own conversion, including that of all others, shows that while he acted with the most entire freedom in choosing Christ, and in serving him through life, he was wholly indebted to the grace of God for such an inclination. Ephes. ii. 1—8. Phil. ii. 13. 2 Tim. i. 9.

This account of the matter agrees with general *experience*, and is attested by innumerable facts. The means of our conversion to Christ may have been various. Some have been first awakened by parental instruction and admonition, some by hearing the word, some by solitary reflection, some by the conversion of others, some by spiritual conversation, and others by afflictive providences. But whatever have been the means, the cause is one and the same: all is attributable to the grace of God, and to that only.

2. Paul would never have *continued a Christian* of his own accord, or if left entirely to himself. Notwithstanding the connection between regeneration and a perseverance to eternal life, it is not because a departure or final apostasy from the faith is in itself impossible; for we should all apostatise, were it not for the grace of God. The spiritual principle implanted in us is not necessarily incorruptible, but is rendered so by the continual communications of grace; just as the soul is rendered immortal by the constant upholding power of God, who 'only hath immortality' and eternal life.

This also corresponds with experience and with fact. The *means* by which we have been enabled to persevere are various; such as, the motives of hope and fear suggested in the Scriptures, private prayer, public ordinances, christian fellowship, and reclaiming visitations; but the *cause* is one, the grace of God, and that alone. But for this, our propensity to depart from God would in a thousand instances have drawn us back to perdition. He it is that keeps us from falling, and shall at last present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. Jude 24. Consider also how many set out in the ways of God at the time we did, or at an earlier or later period, who have since turned back, and walked no more with us. Oh what reason to weep over them; and at the same time to say with the apostle, "by the grace of God I am what I am!"

3. All our *diligence and success in the work of the Lord*, whatever

it may be, is owing to the same cause. It is the grace of God that has led us into the truth as it is in Jesus, and that has kept us in the truth, amidst the aboundings of error, and the jarring opinions of speculative men. If our labours have been effectual to the salvation of souls, or to the edifying of the body of Christ, it is not to us that the praise is due. If sinners are converted by our means, it is not we that convert them, but God. We are only as the rod in the hand of the prophet, by which the rock was smitten; the excellency of the power is of God, and not of us. 2 Cor. iv. 7. x. 4.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) Such being God's system, we must all be saved in this way, if ever we be saved. The foundation of the sacred edifice was laid in grace, and the topstone must be brought forth with shoutings, 'grace, grace unto it.' This will be the song of heaven, and no one can sing it who is not taught to ascribe the whole of his salvation to grace alone.

(2) Let us be careful to learn the doctrine of grace as Paul did, and to entertain his views upon the subject. His doctrine did not tend to licentiousness, did not soothe or flatter the minds of men, or inflate them with an idea of their own sufficiency. On the contrary, its tendency was to humble and abase, and to prostrate the sinner in the dust before God.

(3) His doctrine of grace did not render him inactive, does not relax our obligations to obedience, or furnish any excuse for neglect of duty. It was taught in connection with the use of means, it was exemplified by the most seraphic zeal in the cause of God, and the most incessant labours to promote the best interests of men.

ISRAEL'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE WILDERNESS.

Oh God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; the earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God; even Sinai was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel.—Psalm lxviii. 7, 8.

The psalmist having noticed some of the wonderful works of God for his people, takes occasion to go farther back into the history of Israel, and to sing of his former loving kindnesses. Fresh mercies are well adapted to remind us of former ones, which should not be forgotten.

The God of Israel is here represented under a military character, as going forth at the head of a numerous army. This army was Israel coming up out of Egypt, the host of God mustered for the battle. The description is very majestic, and worthy of the goings forth of a God, ver. 8. The march of the great conquerors of the earth, with their mighty armies, produce wonderful effects, and convulsions among the

nations. But here 'the earth shakes, the heavens also drop at the presence of God, and Sinai itself is moved.'

The text evidently refers to God's appearing on mount Sinai, at the giving of the law, and his going with Israel through the wilderness. The account given by Moses, in Exodus xix. 9, 17, 18, is in full accordance with the text. In the same sublime manner it is described by the psalmist in another place, and also by one of the minor prophets. Psal. cxiv. Heb. iii. 3—7.

I. Offer some general remarks upon the subject.

1. Though God is always glorious in himself, yet there are times especially *when he manifests his glory*, and when he may be said to "go forth," like a mighty monarch, rising from his seat, or like a conqueror going forth to battle. Hab. iii. 3. His goings forth were seen in the creation of the world, which displayed his eternal power and godhead. When he went forth for the destruction of the old world, his awful justice was displayed in bringing a flood upon the ungodly. His goings forth also were seen in the redemption of Israel out of Egypt, when he brought them out with a high hand, and an outstretched arm; and in the same act both saved his people, and destroyed their enemies. In our redemption by the cross of Christ, there was an awful display of his justice, but of justice blended with the tenderest mercy, such as had never been seen in any of his former works. God will go forth more still in the last day, when his fury shall be poured out like fire. At the giving of the law Sinai was moved, and the mountain burned with fire; but when the sentence of that law shall be executed upon the finally impenitent, the earth shall be removed like a cottage, and it shall fall, and not rise again. Isai. xxiv. 19, 20.

2. When God went forth with Israel, it was in a way of *mercy and goodness*, as well as of awful majesty. We seldom hear of the goings forth of the great ones of the earth, unless it be to make conquests, and to fill the world with misery: but it is not so here. "The earth shook, and the heavens dropped;" but it was at "the presence of God, the God of Israel," being unable to sustain the approach of infinite Majesty. The power of God is exercised in a way of righteousness, and therefore is matter of joy, and not of terror, to the righteous. His goings forth are a terror only to the wicked.

3. God did not go forth merely to display his greatness, but to afford *protection* to Israel. "Thou wentest forth *before thy people*." Here was no empty parade, or pomp, or show; but power exercised in a way of mercy. It was the conduct of the gentle shepherd, going before his flock, as their guardian and their guide. We may here observe how the Scriptures delight in blending the most awful grandeur with infinite condescension, pity, and compassion; it is therefore no wonder that these attributes are so often united in the character of the great Redeemer. Isai. xl. 10, 11. God is represented in the text as a mighty conqueror, marching at the head of an army against his enemies; and at the same time as a shepherd, guarding his flock, and walking before them. Psal. lxxvii. 16—20.

4. When God manifested his glory on behalf of his people, it was *at a time when they most needed* his protection and support. "Thou didst march *through the wilderness.*" Moses feared to enter on this expedition, unless Hobab would go with him, and be unto him instead of eyes; and afterwards, unless the Lord would send an angel before him, or would go himself. "If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence." And the Lord said, "I will send mine angel before thee." Israel's path was through a waste howling wilderness; they knew not the way, and were in danger on every side: but God himself would go with them, and would protect them both in front and rear. Isai. lii. 12.

5. He did all this as "*the God of Israel.*" He remembered his holy covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would keep it with their posterity. He had also taken Israel to be his peculiar people, had redeemed them out of Egypt, and made a covenant with them at Sinai; and now he will be their God forever. Amidst the terrors of the holy mount, while all nature seemed convulsed at the presence of Jehovah; what fear, what reverence and love must be excited by the assurance, that this God was "the God of Israel;" theirs by covenant, by promise, and by oath!

II. Apply the subject to ourselves.

1. What God was to Israel in the wilderness, *he is to his people now.* We have a wilderness to pass through as well as they, as dreary, as desolate, and as full of dangers; a dry and thirsty land where no water is, and where many have been discouraged because of the way. But the Captain of our salvation marches before us, and leads us on to victory. All that are going up from Egypt to Canaan have him for their guardian and their guide. God is still going forth for his church in the wilderness, and will never leave it till the ark is safe over Jordan. He knows what enemies there are to his cause, and he will defend it: he shall smite through kings in the day of his wrath. The Lord's host need not fear being overcome, while he is at the head; nor let the little flock fear being lost in the wilderness, while the Shepherd goes before it.

2. What the effects of the divine presence were upon *the natural world,* such also will be its effects upon *the moral world:* When God marched before his people, "the earth shook, and Sinai was moved:" and this was prefigurative of what should be hereafter. Paul reasons upon this subject in Heb. xii. 26: and shows that the shaking of mount Sinai denoted the total dissolution of the Jewish economy. The goings forth of the God of Israel were attended with awful convulsions in the world of nature; and his marching before his people now is attended with great commotions in the political and moral world. What are all the convulsions of kingdoms and empires for many years past, but the effects of God's marching through the wilderness before his people? He is now preparing a place for the ark to rest in, and at his presence the nations tremble. But let not his people be afraid, though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. Psal. xlvi. 1, 2.

3. If his goings forth are so awful now, what will they be *in the end of the world.* If his going forth to redeem his people be such, what will it be when he shall go forth to destroy his enemies. That will be the great and terrible day of the Lord; and who may abide his coming. A fiery flame shall issue before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about. What then will the wicked do, and whither flee for safety. Shall the rocks hide or the mountains cover them from the presence of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb! Yet in that day the Lord will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel. Joel iii. 16.

4. What then shall we think of those who remain *unmoved and insensible,* amidst such scenes of awful grandeur. Shall the earth tremble, and the heavens bow down; and we remain careless and unconcerned! How many of God's goings forth have we witnessed, both in a way of Judgment and of mercy: and shall all this be utterly in vain? We have also seen the wonderful displays of love in providing a Saviour, in affording us a preached gospel, fraught with exceeding great and precious promises: and how then shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation!

CONFORMITY TO CHRIST THE ESSENCE OF TRUE RELIGION.

My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.—Galatians iv. 19.

It is usual with the apostles, when speaking of their instrumentality in the conversion of sinners, to consider themselves as their spiritual fathers, having begotten them by the gospel. Hence Paul looks on these Galatians as a part of his own family, as "his little children," for whose welfare he is most anxiously concerned. From the commencement of their profession he had watched over them with great jealousy, had often prayed and wept on their behalf, and been extremely solicitous about the issue; so much so that he compares his state of mind to the pains and sorrows of a woman in labour. After having felt so much on their account, the apostle at length intimates that, owing to their degeneracy, he had his labour and travail to undergo again, until Christ were really formed in them.

Two things require attention—the nature of true conversion, and the danger of spiritual declension.

I. The nature of genuine religion: is to have "Christ formed in us."

This mode of expression seems to allude to the common resemblance of children to their parents, whose very image may be seen in the fea-

tures of the child; and it was Paul's concern that Christ might be so formed in the Galatian converts, that his image might evidently appear in them.

This account of true religion is very different from our being merely called after *his name:* yet this is all that is pretended by the greater part of those who pass for christians. Such perhaps were many of those at Antioch, who first bore that honourable appellation. Acts xi. 26.

This description of true religion is also very different from our merely putting on *a profession* of christianity: it is being really like Christ having the same mind that was in him.

In illustrating the nature of genuine religion, it might be expected that we should enumerate the various graces as essential parts of it; but they all bear a relation to Christ, and he is the pattern of them all.

Particularly—

1. Christ is *the model of all the graces*, and our souls are to be formed into his likeness. There are other models of moral excellence, but Christ is the substance, the perfection of them all. God's law written in the heart is one of these; but Christ is a living transcript of that law: in him it was entirely and perfectly fulfilled. The moral perfections of the divine nature are another model to which we are to be conformed in our measure and degree. Man was originally created after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness. But Christ is the image of the invisible God, the effulgence of his glory, and the express resemblance of his person. The gospel also is a model, after which believers are to be formed: but Christ is the sum and substance of the gospel. Much is said of the truth dwelling in us, and our being begotten by the word of truth: but Christ is truth itself, the very essence of all that is revealed. The substance of all true religion is love to God and man; this is universal holiness. But the apostle, when exhorting to this, calls it a 'putting on of Christ;' so that a resemblance to him is the sum of all holiness. To have "Christ formed in us," is that which includes all the rest, and gives a perfect identity to true religion.

2. Christ is *the life of all the graces*, as well as the model of them. They are what they are in virtue of our union and communion with him: they have no subsistence separate from him. As inherent in us they would fail and die: it is the vine living in the branches that makes them fruitful: apart of him they are nothing. Hence those expressive forms of speech used by the apostle, when speaking of himself and his of own attainments: 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: I can do all things through Christ strengthening me: be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might: by the grace of God I am what I am.' To have Christ in us, is to have life in us. 1 John v. 12. It is his dwelling in us that keeps all the graces alive, and in full exercise. Ephes. iii. 17—19.

3. The *relation they bear to him* is that which constitutes their value and importance: all is derived from hence. Spiritual knowledge is of great importance, having the promise of eternal life; but Christ is the object of it. John xvii. 2. Phil. iii. 8. Great things are

ascribed to faith; it is that which justifies and saves; but it is wholly on account of the relation that faith bears to Christ. Love or charity is said to be the greatest of all the graces; but if any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, it is all nothing. 1 Cor. xvi. 22. Hope is that also by which we are saved; but Christ is the foundation of all hope, and it is otherwise of no value. Isai. xxviii. 16. If the person and the work of Christ are left out of our religious system, or occupy only a subordinate place, our religion is all a dream.

4. The *motives to the exercise of the graces* are chiefly derived from Christ. The practice of universal holiness is generally enforced by motives or reasons drawn from the doctrine of Christ's mediation. Our being crucified to the world, and the world to us, is by the cross of Christ. Gal. vi. 14. Living to God, and heavenly mindedness, are enforced by motives drawn from his resurrection and ascension to glory. Cor. iii. 2. The commonest duties of the christian life are likewise enforced in the same way; as humility, charity and beneficence. Phil. ii. 7. 2 Cor. viii. 9. Hence it is that the sum and substance of true religion consists in Christ's being formed in us, or our bearing a strict resemblance to his moral attributes. Ephes. iv. 13.

II. Consider the danger of spiritual declension, so as to need that Christ should as it were be formed in us again.

The image of Christ may be so far effaced from the soul as to be scarcely visible, and so as to require to be retraced by the hand of the great artist, whose agency is sufficient to revive and to restore. The Galatians had lost much of the divine impress by departing from the doctrines of Christ, and giving heed to false teachers. We also are in danger of such degeneracy by a departure from the truth, or from the spirit of the gospel, as well as from other causes.

1. It is a matter of fact that some who once bid fair, and 'did run well,' have *gone off from the gospel.* They have slighted the manna, and accounted it light food; have lusted after some new conceit, and forsaken their own mercies. How many have turned aside to error, and followed those who have perverted the right ways of the Lord. The connection between truth and holiness is inviolable, and a departure from the former is inevitably attended with a declension in spirituality and heavenly mindedness.

2. Some who have not erred in theory, have *gone into the world;* have lost all relish for serious and experimental piety, and have no heart for spiritual conversation. The cares of life and the deceitfulness of riches have choked the word, and it is become unfruitful. Nothing of Christ is now to be seen in them but the name. A worldly spirit has been like a worm at the root of the gourd, it has insensibly eaten up all the vitals of godliness.

If ever we be recovered from these spiritual decays, it must be by going over the ground again. Ministers must begin their work afresh, must "travail in birth again," must dwell upon first principles, and lay again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith to-

wards God. Heb. vi. 1. Backsliders must do the same; they must go to the cross of Christ afresh, as Jonah looked again towards the holy temple.

MYSTERIES OF PROVIDENCE AND GRACE.

Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God: how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!—Romans xi. 33.

It is a profoundly important subject on which the apostle is here discoursing, namely, God's casting away the Jews, and admitting the gentiles into the christian church. Paul, though inspired, cannot fathom the depth of this design: he can only stand as it were upon the shore, and admire the vast abyss: and if angels had been employed in a similar meditation, they would have united with him in the same language.

All therefore that we can possibly attempt on this subject, is only to view it for the purpose of exciting our admiration also, without pretending to explain what is incomprehensible.

I. Offer a few remarks on the terms of the text.

1. The things which principally attract attention are the *wisdom and knowledge of God*. The knowledge of God denotes his perfect acquaintance with all things past, present, and to come. The wisdom of God consists in the disposal and arrangement of all things for the accomplishment of his designs. Knowledge in creatures may exist with but little wisdom, and wisdom with but little information. But with God every thing is naked and open, and his understanding is infinite: he is never at a loss to know what to do, and how to dispose of every thing to the greatest good.

2. The wisdom and knowledge of God are especially displayed *in his judgments and mercies*, with respect to the dispensation of the gospel. God is infinitely wise in all his works, but in the great work of redemption he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; and in the dispensation of the gospel there is a marvellous display of these attributes, especially in the 'goodness and severity of God' towards Jews and gentiles. His awful judgments on the unbelieving, and his tender mercy to them that receive the truth, are adapted to fill us with holy reverence and fear.

3. The wisdom and knowledge of God are here expressed *by several terms*, tending to convey a fulness of meaning, and to heighten our admiration. The apostle calls it "the depth of the riches," both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, and declares it to be "unsearchable and past finding out." We cannot trace the conduct of God; his

path is in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known. We are unable to form any thing like a judgment of the reason of his dispensations, except as they are gradually unfolded to us by subsequent events.

II. Notice the examples of wisdom and knowledge here referred to, as illustrative of the text.

In general it respects the dealings of God with Jews and gentiles; and there are three things in particular which may be selected from the context, as highly interesting and important.

1. God's causing the unbelief of the one to be *the occasion of good to the other*. This is an instance of the unsearchable riches of his wisdom and knowledge. First the gentiles 'believed not God' for some thousands of years, ver. 30; and God's passing them over was the occasion of good to Israel, for that was the time of Israel's 'fulness.' At length Israel sinks into unbelief, and that becomes the occasion of salvation to the gentiles. This is expressed by the casting of them off, as the reconciling of the world; and the fall of them, as the enriching of the gentiles, ver. 12, 15. This affecting truth was illustrated by our Lord in the parable of the supper, where the rejection of the gospel by the Jews became the occasion of its being sent to the gentiles. Matt. xxii.

2. The wisdom of God is seen in his so ordering and overruling the condition of both as to *provoke each other to emulation*. The gentiles were first excited by the believing Jews, who carried the gospel into the heathen world; and now the Jews are to be excited by the gentiles, who are seeking to disseminate the gospel in all nations, and are anxiously concerned for the restoration and salvation of Israel. In such a view of the mysteries of providence and of grace, who can help exclaiming, Oh the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and kowledge of God.

3. The mystery also appears in God's *timing both his judgments and his mercies*, so as to cause both Jews and gentiles to feel their dependence upon him, and their obligation to one another. If the gentiles had not been left in unbelief, and without the gospel, it would not have been known but that the world by wisdom might have come to the knowledge of God; but time was given to demonstrate the fallacy of such a hope, when God suffered all nations to walk in their own way. Acts xviii. 26, 27. 1 Cor. i. 21. Neither would they have felt indebted to the Jews for the knowledge of salvation, 'though their debtors they were.' So on the contrary, if the Jews had not been left in unbelief as afterwards they were, their salvation would not have appeared so eminently of grace. They would have thought it almost impossible but that they should believe, with such a flood of evidence before them: but God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. The salvation of both Jews and gentiles is now most manifestly a matter of mere grace. Neither would the Jews have felt indebted to the gentiles as now they will do, if we become the means of their salvation, and they should obtain mercy through our having found

mercy, ver. 31. Now what an amazing compass of design there was in all this: how it tends to humble both Jews and gentiles in the sight of God, and to endear them to one another as the means of each other's salvation!

III. Apply the subject to ourselves, and see what we can learn from it.

1. Let us enquire whether there be not *similar goodness and severity* manifested in the dispensation of providence, and for similar purposes. Great "goodness" has been shown to Britain in sending us the gospel at a very early period, and continuing it amongst us to this day; but great "severity" to other nations, in concluding them in a state of unbelief, ver. 32. On the other hand, while the gospel is sent to this country, there are great multitudes amongst us who still remain in unbelief, and to whom the arm of the Lord is not revealed: yet in the meantime many of the poor heathen receive the gospel, and are entering into the kingdom of heaven before us. The injured Africans have often been looked down upon with contempt, as an in-inferior race of men; yet many of them received the truth, believe and are saved; and those whom we have oppressed and enslaved are entering into the liberty of the children of God. There is also great goodness towards some churches and congregations, which have enjoyed much spiritual prosperity: yet multitudes of individuals among them still remain in ignorance and unbelief, and have not seen when good cometh. Jer. xvii. 6. God also removes the ark and the candlestick from one place to another, now illuminating the east and the west, and alternately leaving them in darkness: and all this to humble us before him, and to fill us with admiration. How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out.

2. Learn to recognize *the hand of God* in all that befalls us, both of good and evil. The less we think of second causes the better, and the more we shall see of God. Gen. l. 20.

3. This subject may teach us to be *reconciled to the dispensations of providence*, however dark or mysterious. Many events befall us which we cannot comprehend, but we may rest assured that whatever God permits is for some wise end. It will be so to others, and also to us, if we love God, and are called according to his purpose. He will not cast away his people whom he foreknew. Rom. viii. 28. xi. 2.

IMPROVEMENT OF TIME.

Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.—Ephesians v. 16.

Amongst all the talents that God has committed to our trust, time is one of the most important. Our years are passing away like a tale

that is told, but they will come to some account at last; and if every day and hour bears a relation to eternity, we cannot be too watchful over the lapse of time, and the manner in which it is employed.

The text exhorts us to "redeem" it, to recover or retrieve what is lost. There is a sense indeed in which this would be impossible, seeing that time cannot be recalled: but it may be redeemed by making the best use of what remains, and this is what the text intends.

I. Consider what is implied in the exhortation, namely, that much of our time has been lost, or spent in vain.

A great deal of it has run to waste, and come to nothing. This is true of all, even of the most diligent and watchful. For example—

1. All the time that has been spent *in the service of sin and Satan* is lost, and worse than lost. In this respect we lived in vain, and might as well not have lived at all. We had the same opportunities of spiritual improvement then as now, the same means and the same motives; but all to no purpose. The door of faith stood open, but we cared not to enter in; all our mercies and advantages were like a price in the hands of a fool to get wisdom, but who had no heart for it. Some lived in open profaneness, others to a selfish end, and all to no valuable purpose; nothing was done for God, or the best interests of man. Some have lived many years, perhaps the greater part of life, without God in the world; and all the firstfruits were thrown away and lost. Every sinner while such, is a blank in the creation, the end of his existence is not answered: and in this view, what a source of bitter reflection is furnished by the remembrance of the days of our vanity!

2. All the time, even since our conversion, in which we *have not lived to God*, is as good as lost. Alas, how much time has been squandered away in sinful indulgences and carnal ease, in sloth and negligence. Oh how much more might we have known of the mind of God, and done for his glory, than we have done. Some have wasted their time in frivolous amusements, which will not bear reflection; others in fruitless cares, poring over past troubles which admit of no remedy, and dreading future ills which may never come to pass. Some have consumed the greater part of their time in the eager pursuits of business, and hoarding up wealth, not knowing who shall gather it. In short, all that time which has been spent in seeking our own interest, rather than the interest and the glory of Christ, is wasted and lost. We are his servants, and not our own; our time and our all is his; and if not devoted to his service, will turn to a dreadful account.

II. Enquire in what way we are exhorted to redeem time, or recover what is past.

In general, it is to make the best use of what remains. Here a few directions will be needful—

1. Let us see that matters be right, *between God and our own souls.* This is like seeing that our way is right before we set out, or

the farther we advance the more time will be lost. Is it doubtful whether our hearts be right in the sight of God? Go then as a sinner to the Saviour without delay: and if you have not yet been to him, it is time you should. If any be halting betwixt two opinions, betwixt God and the world, it is time you came to some decision, as to whom you will serve. If you be in doubt about yourselves, and about your state, it is necessary in the first place to have that point settled.

2. In all we do in religion let us see to it *that our motives be pure.* Without this it will be all lost time: we may be very diligent and laborious in religious matters, and yet do nothing for God, nor for our own spiritual advantage. If we preserve a *right end* in all we do, that will turn every thing into a right use: we shall then serve the Lord in our relaxations, as well as in our religious duties. Do nothing but what is capable of such an end, and will admit of prayer for a blessing. This is a good criterion by which to judge of the lawfulness or expediency of any undertaking, which may in itself be doubtful.

3. Let us be concerned not only to be right, but to be *kept right, by keeping near to God.* Whatever is made to give way, let it not be those seasons of intercourse and communion with God which are essential to our spiritual prosperity, but let that be the thing that *must* be, whatever becomes of the rest. This will make every other duty pleasant, and be like oil to the wheel: without it, all will go on heavily. If we keep up the less spiritual exercises to the neglect of this, our time and labour will be lost.

4. Let us be careful to do every thing *in its proper time and season.* Order and arrangement is of great importance in every undertaking, and it is not less so in religion. Suffer not one duty to drive out another, or to supersede its necessity. It is not by excess of labour that we have most success, but by doing every thing in its season. Hence it is that men of real business are never in a hurry, every thing has its proper time and place.

5. Whatever we do for God, *let us do it with all our might.* There is no other way of serving him acceptably: if our hearts and souls are not engaged, all we do will come to nothing.

III. The motive by which the exhortation is enforced: Redeeming the time, "because the days are evil."

1. There is a great deal of *moral evil* in the world, and therefore no time to be lost in opposing it. There is much to be done for God and but little time to do it in. There is much evil in the church, much in our families, much in our own hearts; and as the time is short, great and incessant exertions are required.

2. There is also much *natural evil* in the world, which calls for increased diligence and patience. We are subject to many afflictions and trials, tending to unfit us for active services, and lessening our opportunities of doing good. We are liable to *sickness* and disease, and should therefore make the most of health while we enjoy it. If no particular affliction overtake us, yet *old age* will come with all its

train of evils, and therefore make the most of youth while you possess it. Eccles. xii. 1. We are liable to great *reverses* in our wordly circumstances, therefore let us lay ourselves out for God while we have it in our power. Eccles. xi. 1, 2. We are liable to opposition and *persecution*, from wicked and unreasonable men, as were the apostles; let us therefore make the most of liberty while we have it, and employ all our present means of doing good. The present life is the seedtime of eternity: now is the accepted time, and this is the day of salvation.

THE TRIUMPHS OF THE CHURCH.

The Lord gave the word, great was the company of those that published it. Kings of armies did flee apace, and she that tarried at home divided the spoil.—Psalm lxviii. 11, 12.

The goodness of the Lord is celebrated, for supplying his people in the wilderness with a plentiful rain, and loading them with benefits; and then for defending them from danger, and subduing all their enemies. In ver. 7, 8, God is represented under a military character, as going forth before his people. The text seems to be a continuation of that figure, and to contain the orders of a commander in chief. The period referred to may be when Israel first entered into Canaan to subdue the land, and during the wars in the times of their Judges.

(1) "The word" here may denote the word of command, which God gave for the destruction of the Canaanites. If so, it ensured their success, and no people could withstand them. Num. xxi. 34. Psal. cviii. 7—9. But if at any time they went forth without the word, they were sure to be discomfitted. Num. xiv. 40—45.

(2) It may mean the shout given before a battle, to inspire them with courage, and to strike terror and dismay into the hearts of their enemies. This was usual in former as well as in later times, as may be seen in the case of Gideon, in the destruction of the Midianites. Judges vii. 18.

(3) By "the word" here may be meant the tidings of victory, which every one would be ready to "publish," and which were celebrated in their heroic songs. When the Lord gave the word for the destruction of Pharaoh and his host, the children of Israel sung the triumph by the Red Sea. Exod. xv. The song of Baruk and of Deborah was another of this description, Judges v.; also of the people of Israel, when David had destroyed Goliah of Gath. 1 Sam. xviii. 6, 7.

(4) By the Lord's "giving the word" is ment his giving the victory, and this would fill the mouth of every one with good tidings. This was eminently the case in the times of Joshua, when he made such a slaughter amongst the Canaanitish kings in the valley of Aijalon. Josh. x. 11, 12.

(5) To show the ease with which many of their victories were achieved, and the total defeat of their enemies, "she that tarried at home" is represented as "dividing the spoil." This was remarkably verified in the destruction of the Midianites in the plains of Moab, as well as in other instances. Num. xxxi. 27.

The text thus briefly explained, will be seen evidently to refer to the great victories obtained by Israel over their enemies. But in most parts of the history of Israel there is an intended allusion to gospel times, and to the kingdom of our Lord. This psalm is particularly applied in the New Testament to Christ's victory over our spiritual enemies, and to his subsequent ascension to glory. Ephes. iv. 8. We are therefore from hence led to the following

Observation: That the glorious news of salvation by Christ furnishes a more important subject for publication, than the greatest victories achieved by the Jewish Church and state.

1. Because *our enemies* are far more formidable than theirs. Theirs was a contest with men; they wrestled with flesh and blood. Their warfare was temporal, and their weapons were altogether carnal. But we wrestle with principalities and powers, with spiritual wickednesses in high places. Their enemies were strong and mighty, many of them of the sons of Anak: but ours are more numerous and mighty than they. Satan and all his hosts, the world with all its allurements, flesh and sense with all their fascinations. Who then is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? To obtain the victory over sin is a greater achievement than the conquest of a nation; and in this we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

2. Our deliverance is obtained at *a far greater expense.* The conquest of Canaan cost a multitude of lives, and a great price was given for Israel's redemption out of Egypt. 'I gave Sheba for thee, and Seba for thy life.' But oh the price that was paid for our redemption from the curse of the law, and from the dominion of sin! The victory was obtained, but it cost the Saviour's blood. The strong holds of Satan are destroyed, and the captive is delivered; but it required an almighty arm, and the interposition of the Son of God himself. 1 John iii. 8.

3. The nature of our enemies is such that we have *no reason to regret their destruction.* When great national victories are obtained there is much rejoicing, and the tidings are spread far and wide; yet but few consider what a multitude of lives have been sacrificed for that purpose. And even with respect to the wars of Israel with the Canaanites, there was much to abate the joy of victory. So many of their enemies cut off in their sins and in their blood, must have furnished very painful reflections to the pious among them. But the victory obtained for us by the death of Christ, leaves no such regret behind it. That Satan's empire is destroyed, that his pains are frustrated, and our sins doomed to irretrievable destruetion, is matter of unmixed and everlasting joy and triumph.

4. *The spoil is greater and more glorious,* than was divided among the armies of Israel. In many of the victories which they obtained, the conquerors returned home laden with spoil, and this would be a part of the good tidings they had to publish. But what are all the riches and honours obtained by the conquerors of this world compared with the blessings of the gospel, which are the spoils of Christ's triumph on the cross. We also enjoy the fruits of all those dreadful conflicts which apostles and martyrs sustained, without being exposed to similar trials: and thus it is that "those who tarry at home divide the spoil."

5. The tidings of the gospel are therefore *more worthy of being published* than those of the conquest of Canaan; and if these filled the Jewish nation with joy and triumph, how much more the news of salvation by the cross of Christ. When "the Lord gave the word, great was the company of those that published it." It filled the mouths of the apostles with good tidings, and they were eager to publish it among all nations, not counting their lives dear unto them, that they might testify the gospel of the grace of God. Common Christians also made it their business to proclaim the gospel to their friends and neighbours, and to all around them. Mark v. 19. John i. 17. In a little time all Judea was filled with their doctrine, and their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world. Rom. x. 18. In the latter day also, when the Lord shall give the word for the utter destruction of antichrist, and the subduing of the nations to himself, great shall be the company of them that publish it. Already hath the Church put on the armour of truth and righteousness, and is waiting the high command. Already are the missionaries prepared for conflict at their several stations, and the heralds to proclaim the victory. As soon therefore as the Captain of salvation shall appear, and begin to smite the nations with the sword that goeth out of his mouth, the armies of heaven shall follow, and the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.

GUILT AND DANGER OF NEGLECTING THE GOSPEL.

But they made light of it.—Matthew xxii. 5.

It is a very interesting idea that is here given us of the grace of God, in Christ Jesus our Lord. A king is represented as making a marriage for his son, and setting forth an entertainment for the guests. It is a feast of the richest and best provisions, and consists of the greatest abundance. The invitation to partake is perfectly free, without money and without price, and even a garment is provided for the guests. All are invited without exception or distinction, for the feast is made unto all

people. Isai. xxv. 6. Such in reality is the gospel: yet of some it is said, "they made light of it."

To "make light" is to treat a matter as of small account, to neglect or to despise it. Thus has the great salvation been treated in all ages. Heb. ii. 3. Such was the conduct of the unbelieving Jews, and such is still the spirit of great multitudes to this day. There are many ways in which human depravity is found to operate; and this, though commonly overlooked, is a great offence to God, and as dangerous as any that can be named.

I. Observe the fact, that the gospel is, in general, but lightly regarded.

We have only to look around us, to be convinced of this awful and affecting truth.

1. Is it not lightly regarded by *the great and the gay world?* Do not the higher orders in general affect to consider serious religion as only fit for vulgar minds? How many of these, like Gallio, care for none of these things. Or if they deign to think about religion, it is only to treat it as a matter of levity, and load it with obloquy and reproach.

2. Is this not also the case with *common people*, as well as with the higher ranks of society? There is a prevalent anxiety about what we shall eat, and what we shall drink, and wherewithal we shall be clothed: but where are the people who enquire what they must do to be saved? Where are those who seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; or who consider the salvation of the soul as the one thing needful?

3. What *multitudes who attend the gospel,* think little or nothing about what they hear, as at all concerning themselves! It is all lost upon them: they come and go without any improvement, or any desire after it. How lightly are the doctrines of the gospel esteemed by multitudes who call themselves christians! Though they are the great things of God's law, they are counted as strange things. Its precepts and its threatenings are regarded with similar indifference, as if possessing no authority, and might be violated with impunity. Many there are who make so light of the salvation of Christ as never to put up one prayer for an interest in its blessings; and who, while they have no hope beyond the grave, no good hope, can nevertheless live at ease, and be contented as they are. They make so light of eternal life, that they never can find time to seek after it in real earnest, or make the salvation of their souls the chief concern.

II. Consider the sinfulness of this conduct, in treating the gospel with indifference and neglect.

We may be allowed to regard some things with indifference, and to make light of them, and it may even be proper for us so to do: but that is not the case here.

1. Things of *small account* require to be treated accordingly.

If the blessings of the gospel were in themselves of little value, such as were obtained at a trifling expense, and such as the giver himself reckoned but of small importance; we might then be allowed to treat them lightly. Such indeed is the case with worldly riches and honours, and even with thrones and empires. God bestows them often upon the basest of men, and commonly upon his enemies. But the substance of the gospel is Christ himself, God's unspeakable gift, containing all the unsearchable riches both of grace and glory. Our salvation was obtained at an infinite expense: the world was created by a word, but its redemption required the incarnation and sacrifice of the Son of God. To make light of this therefore is to make light of Christ, of his cross, of his tears, and of his blood.

2. Things important in themselves, may yet be light when *compared with other things*, and may therefore require to be treated lightly. Our present afflictions may be heavy upon us, yet they are light when compared with a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. But the gift of Christ, and salvation by him, is a gift with which nothing can be compared. There is no love like his, no sorrows like his sorrows; no deliverance so great as that which he effected by his death, no evil like that from which we are delivered, no good compared with that which his salvation comprehends. 1 Cor. ii. 9.

3. Things valuable and important in themselves, may have little or no value and importance *in reference to us*, because they do not concern us, and have no influence upon our interest or welfare. What historians or astronomers tell us may all be very true, and in itself important; but it concerns us not, except as an agreeable speculation, or a matter of mere amusement. Now, if redemption by the blood of the cross were like this, we might be allowed to treat it lightly. But it is of the most immediate and urgent concern to us, involving all our present and future interests; and in comparison of which, all other concerns are nothing but vanity. What would be the first concern of the man-slayer, with the avenger of blood in pursuit, but to flee for his life to the city of refuge. What of a stung Israelite, expiring on the ground, but to look to the brazen serpent, that he may live and not die. What the first concern of a man under a dangerous disease, but to seek for a physician: all that a man hath will he give for his life. Yet how many are content, while in their sins and in their blood; how many in danger of eternal perdition, without seeking for the remedy; neglecting the great salvation, and making light of that gospel which alone hath the words of eternal life.

4. Some things, though interesting for the present, may be treated with comparative indifference, *because of short duration*. It is thus with the joys and sorrows of the present life, and hence we are commanded to weep and rejoice as though we wept and rejoiced not. But the gospel is everlasting, and all its blessings are eternal in their duration. We bear the impression of immortality, are doomed to eternal wrath and punishment, and need a salvation that is commensurate with the whole of our existence. Can any language then describe the awful guilt of treating with indifference or contempt the name, the only name given under heaven or among men, whereby we must be saved.

III. Enquire a little into the reasons or causes of this sinful neglect and contempt of the gospel.

Why do men despise what so deeply concerns them, when they are so generally alive to their own interest? It arises from the aversion of the heart to God. If we love a fellow creature, we do not make light of his friendship, or feel indifferent at his displeasure. We can find time for the pleasures of social intercourse, and are not apt to forget those we love.

1. In particular, this indifference to the invitations of the gospel arises from the want of *a proper sense of the evil of sin.* Those who make light of the Saviour make light of sin, and of the consequences to which it exposes them. If the remedy be neglected, it is because the disease is neither felt nor understood.

2. It arises from *inveterate unbelief*, not considering that God is in earnest in his threatenings. This leads to the persuasion that there is no need of such a Saviour, that a little repentance and reformation will be sufficient, and therefore that the concerns of salvation may be delayed without any great danger.

3. It arises from men's being intoxicated with *the cares and pursuits of the present world.* Thus in the text, those who were invited to the gospel feast were going to "their farms and their merchandise," and could not spare time to attend the call. Business demanded their attention, and the concerns of another world must wait some future opportunity. Thus it is that multitudes perish, by an inordinate love of the present world. Matt. xvi. 26.

Beware of this example. You consider death at a distance, and so make light of the invitations of the gospel; but it may be nearer than you expect, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh.

Let serious christians be thankful, that they have been brought to view things in some measure as they are. What a mercy, that some have been 'compelled' to come in, and taught to value those things which others continue to disregard. Some poor people have done this, and they are happy. Some of the rich and eminent have embraced the gospel, and have found it their greatest treasure.

THE NEED OF AN ALMIGHTY SAVIOUR.

Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty: I have exalted one chosen out of the people.—Psalm lxxxix. 19.

Much is said in this psalm of the covenant made with David, and which he so much rejoiced in towards the close of life, saying, 'Although my house be not so with God, yet hath he made with me an everlasting

covenant, ordered in all things and sure.' This covenant was an advance on that made with Abraham: it not only contained a promise that the Messiah should be of his seed, but that he should sit upon the throne of his father David, Isai. ix. 7; and this was what David himself so much rejoiced in. 2 Sam. xxiii. This covenant being understood to include in it all the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom, is hence called 'the sure mercies of David.' Isai. lv. 7, 8.

Several things in this psalm may apply to David himself, as in ver. 3. The text also seems in the first instance to refer to him, ver. 19, 20, as being chosen and exalted as the man after God's own heart. But then it refers to him chiefly as a type of the Messiah, the language being too strong to be fully applicable to any mere man. We may therefore very safely apply the words of the text to Christ.

"Thou spakest in vision to thy holy one," may be rendered "to thy holy ones," and so may refer to the prophets, to whom it was revealed in visions. Others render it, "concerning thy holy one," that is, Christ, as in Psal. xvi. 10. In this view, three things present themselves to our meditation—

I. The affecting truth implied in the language of the text, and that is, our ruined and helpless state as sinners.

"Laying help upon one that is mighty," supposes that we have destroyed ourselves. Hos. xiii. 9. We are apt to speak of this affecting truth too much without feeling it; but could we realize our immortality, our accountableness, the character of Him against whom we have offended, the curse that we are under, the deep-rooted nature of evil in our hearts, and our utter inability to make an atonement, or to deliver our own souls; we should then feel where we are.

A state of wretchedness which requires such an interposition, and such a Saviour, must be truly deplorable. We are accountable creatures, we we are sinners, sinners against God, under the curse of the law, without strength, either to avert his wrath or to do his will. So deep and inveterate is our depravity, that it is not in us to repent or return to God, or do any thing but add sin to sin. We are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity. This is the state in which we see others involved, and the state in which we ourselves are found, completely ruined and undone.

On this principle the apostles founded the doctrines of grace; of pardon, justification, and eternal life. All are of sovereign grace, the free gift of God, through a mediator. Ephes. i. 3. ii. 3. And if this be true, our guilty, helpless, ruined condition as sinners is undeniable.

All that is called religion, which does not begin here, tends to subvert the gospel, and to set at nought the remedy which God has provided. Man's total depravity, and ruined state by nature, lies at the foundation of the whole gospel.

II. Consider God's laying help on Christ, as on "one that is mighty."

It is spoken to us as being done, even before it was revealed to the

prophet. It was done in God's eternal purpose: the remedy was provided, before the disease existed. The Lamb was slain, and the kingdom prepared, from the foundation of the world. Christ also speaks of a work being committed to him, prior to the incarnation, which he calls the Father's will. Psal. xi. 7, 8. This was to raise up the tribes of Jacob, to restore the preserved of Israel, and to be God's salvation unto the ends of the earth. Isai. lxix. 6.

The whole issue of our salvation rested on his interposition. If he had failed like the first Adam, all would have been over with us. If he had been overcome by temptation in the wilderness, our redemption had been impossible. If he had sunk under our sins, and the weight of divine vengeance, we must have sunk in irretrievable perdition. But it was promised that he should not fail nor be discouraged, till the purposes of his heart were all accomplished. Isai. xlii. 4. If his atonement had not fully purged away our guilt, we could not be pardoned and saved; but he did it by offering up himself, a sacrifice of infinite worth. Heb. i. 2. If he had not risen from the dead, and ascended to glory, his work would have been incomplete: and did he not live forever to make intercession for us, he could not save us to the uttermost. Heb. vii. 25. Every thing shows the greatness of the undertaking, and the qualifications requisite to ensure its success. Let us therefore consider,

III. The suitableness of his character for so great an undertaking.

Christ is " one that is mighty, one chosen out of the people." The former seems to denote his divinity, the latter his humanity. These attributes are frequently compared in the holy Scriptures, in reference to the person of Christ. He is ' the child born, and yet the mighty God; the root and the offspring of David, David's Son and David's Lord; of the fathers, concerning the flesh, and yet over all, God blessed for ever.'

It was necessary that he should sustain this twofold character, in order to his making a real atonement for sin, Heb. ii 14, 17; and afterwards pleading its merits before the throne of God. Heb. iv. 14, 15.

If he had not been " chosen out of the people," there would have been no fitness in his becoming a substitute for them; nor in imputing to them what he did and suffered in their stead. If at the same time he had not been " the mighty one," the Son of God, none of this would have been availing.

(1) Then, where God has " laid help," thither must we repair for help; and in coming to Christ we must come as utterly helpless and undone. Isai. xxviii. 16.

(2) Know also and consider your own condition. Rest not any where else, but in him who is mighty to save; and this not only at first, but all the way through life, receiving from his fullness grace for grace.

MOTIVES TO DILIGENCE AND PERSEVERANCE.

That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.—Hebrews vi. 12.

When we look upon mankind in general we see but few who set out in the way to heaven, and fewer still who hold out to the end. Many professors in the apostle's time turned back, and it was his constant labour to seek after their recovery. This indeed is one of the main objects of the epistle to the Hebrews.

We see the same thing still; and more than this, we feel them in ourselves. There is a constant propensity to turn back, or to stop short in our race. Hence the exhortation in the text is applicable to us, as well as to those to whom it was originally addressed.

I. Consider the evil against which we are here cautioned: "that we be not slothful."

This is the opposite of that holy activity and persevering diligence in the ways of God, which the sacred writer himself exemplified in his own conduct, pressing towards the mark, and reaching after those things which are before. Phil.iii. 13, 14. 2 Pet. i. 5, 6.

Slothfulness arises from an inordinate love of ease. It is a sin which we are apt to overlook, because it is merely negative, and consists not directly in doing evil, but in not doing good. Positive evils are not so lightly regarded, such as intemperance, falsehood, and deceit: these fill us with alarm. But slothfulness steals insensibly upon us, and leads on to what is positively evil. No one can begin to be inactive in the ways of God, but he will begin to be active in something else. David's fall was occasioned in this way, and it is the first step taken by the tempter to ruin souls. If Samson had not first slept on the lap of ease and sensual indulgence, he would not have been destroyed by the Philistines. Almost all our falls originate in a relaxed attention to the interests of religion, in indifference to the duty of prayer and watchfulness, and close walking with God; and this leads on to something else.

More particularly—

1. A general idleness *in temporal things* will extend itself to the concerns of religion; and where the habit is contracted, it will be ruinous both to our temporal and spiritual interest. Prov. xxiv. 30—34. But religious sloth is not confined to this; for we may be very diligent in other things, and yet be heartless in religion. The Laodiceans it seems were men of business, and had enriched themselves by their industry; but in spiritual things they were poor and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked. Our earthly vineyard may flourish, and the vineyard of the soul lie waste.

2. Slothfulness is the sin of those who *magnify difficulties*, and so never engage in any thing for God in good earnest. They are

for excusing themselves in whatever requires any great exertion, or the exercise of self-denial. With such characters as these there is always some lion in the way, which hinders their going forth. Prov. xxii. 13. xxvi. 13, 14.

3. It is a sin which characterises *the unprofitable servant*, who is to be cast into outer darkness. It is this which makes men good for nothing in the world, and in the church of God. Their talent is put into a napkin, their light under a bushel; and like the barren fig-tree, they bring forth no fruit. Matt. xxv. 24—30. Luke xiii. 7.

4. It is the great sin of many who attend *the means of grace*. They go and come, like the door on its hinges, but make no progress. Prov. xxvi. 14. This is the case too, with a great many ineffectual desires that never excite to action: 'the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing.' Many who attend the preaching of the gospel think they desire the blessings of salvation, while they have no heart to seek after them in real earnest.

5. It is a sin which easily besets *christians themselves*, especially in times of great difficulty and discouragement. Under certain impressions there is often a good degree of zeal, particularly in the commencement of the christian life, and when things go well in the church of God: but when trials come on, there is danger of our relaxing and becoming slothful. It was so with Israel in the wilderness: when the way was found to be hard and difficult, they were for turning back again to Egypt, though at first they sung the praises of their great deliverer. It was so with the Galatians: at first they ran well, but afterwards slackened in their course. The Hebrews also endured a great fight of afflictions in the commencement of their profession, and took joyfully the spoiling of their goods; but now they are ready to turn aside, and to faint in the day of adversity. So in times of a great revival of religion, a stimulus is given to general exertion, and the zeal of many abounds; but when the church of God is under a cloud, all are in danger of sinking into sloth and negligence. Let us therefore notice,

II. The example set before us to excite our diligence: "be ye followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

There is something very appropriate in the motive here suggested, as it shows the practicability of things which slothfulness would deem to be impracticable; and example is much better than precept. That which has been done, may be done again: if therefore we are tempted to become slothful in the ways of God, let us recollect the conduct of believers in former times, and derive encouragement from their example. In particular,

1. Consider *the zeal and ardour* of those who have gone before us, and the difficulties which they overcame. When called to exercise self-denial, let us think of what Abraham did in offering up his son, and Moses in forsaking Egypt, and refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. When blessings are suspended, we are ready to faint and grow weary, and to refrain prayer, having no hope of suc-

cess: but at such a time let us remember Caleb, who brought Israel into the land after Moses had left them in the wilderness. Josh. xiv. 11, 12. When hardships and dangers are in the way, think of the apostles and martyrs who counted not their lives dear unto them for the sake of the Lord Jesus. When discouraged by the want of success in all our labours, let us think of Isaiah, and also of the Saviour, who laboured almost in vain, and spent their strength for nought. Isai. liii. 1, xlix. 4, 5. If unhappily strife and contention should enter in, let us not forget that Paul and others had similar trials, and yet their zeal and ardour in the cause of God were not abated.

2. Observe *the means* by which they preserved and overcame, it was by "faith and patience." These graces are peculiar to the present world, their work is to lead to Canaan. It is by "faith" that we are interested in the promises, that we become the children of God, and the heirs of eternal life. Though predestinated to the adoption of children it is by faith that we enjoy the privileges of adoption. It is by a life of faith that we endure the evils of the present world, looking at the things that are not seen, and which are eternal. 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. "Patience" also must have its perfect work: this is a suffering grace, and must often be called into exercise. Faith and patience united will carry us through: faith keeps its eye upon the promise and patience waits for its fulfilment.

3. *The blessed end* to which they have now attained: they "inherit the promises." Some of the promises are enjoyed in this life, but the greater part are reserved for the world to come. We have here found the promises to be true: strength has been equal to our day, God has been with us in six and in seven troubles, and has never left nor forsaken us. But a rest is promised, a weight of glory, and a crown of righteousness. All these are inherited by departed saints, and shall finally be the portion of all them that believe. A little more faith, a little more patience, and the victory will be achieved.

NEED OF DIVINE ASSISTANCE IN PRAYER.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.—Romans viii. 29.

Prayer has been the distinguishing practice of the godly in all ages, and no real believer can live without it. Yet for this, as well as for all other spiritual duties, we are insufficient, and need the Holy Spirit to teach and help us. Yea, more than in any other duty, as it is of all others the most spiritual, and therefore the most difficult to be performed aright. There is no nearness to God in this exercise, without a considerable degree of spirituality, and abstraction from the present world

I. Consider our insufficiency for this great duty: "We know not what we should pray for as we ought.

It is intimated that we are insufficient in two respects, both as to the matter and manner of prayer.

1. As to the *matter of prayer*: "we know not *what* to pray for." We know some things that we want, and should ask for; but on the whole we are exceedingly ignorant and uninformed.

Particularly, *we are apt to pray for many things which if granted would be for our hurt:* and 'who knoweth what is good for man in this life?' We may think uninterrupted health and prosperity would be desirable: yet afflictions are often amongst our greatest blessings, and continued prosperity might have been our ruin. We may think it good that the life of our children and friends should be spared; yet we know not what they would be to us, if our desire were granted. Paul had a thorn in the flesh which he wished to have removed, but the Lord saw it needful to be there. We may desire a station in the church, which we are not qualified to occupy; like the two disciples who wanted to sit, one on the right hand and the other on the left, in the kingdom of their Lord; but were told 'they knew not what they asked.' In all such cases our feelings and wishes must be subordinated to the will of God, saying with our blessed Lord, Not my will, but thine be done. We may ask as he did, to have the bitter cup removed; but we must also submit as he did.

Again: *We omit praying for many things which are essential to our good.* It is well that God's giving is not measured by our asking, and that he gives exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Ephes. iii. 20. We know not the difficulties that lie before us, and therefore cannot ask specifically for what is necessary. David saw none of these when he was anointed king, nor what troubles would attend his reign. If Peter had been duly aware of the temptation that would befall him, he might have prayed against that fatal hour: but it was well that Christ foresaw it, and prayed for him that his faith might not fail. Every day of our lives we know not what to ask in particular, and can only commit our way unto the Lord, that our goings may be established.

2. As to *the manner of praying*: "we know not what we should pray for *as we ought*." Even in those things which we know we ought to pray for, we know not how to ask aright, or in a proper manner. There are some things which we know we need, as our daily bread, the forgiveness of our sins, and to be kept from temptation: yet we know not how to pray for them in such a manner as is required. It is intimated in the text that there is something belonging to the manner of true prayer, which is necessary to render it acceptable in the sight of God; and that those who draw near to him are required to pray "as they ought." This may include the following particulars—

(1) That *our hearts be fixed*, and engaged with God in this sacred duty. It must be the prayer of faith, pleading the promises, and relying on their fulfilment. But how difficult it is to have our hearts thus engaged, thus intently fixed on the great object of prayer: how prone to turn aside like a deceitful bow!

(2) That we approach God *with humility and deep abasement.* The gospel has placed us on low ground, and there we must stand whenever we appear before God; as sinners ready to perish, as utterly unworthy, crying out with the publican, God be merciful to me a sinner. The Pharisee prayed, but knew not how to pray as he ought, and it availed nothing. See the case of the poor woman, who did pray as she ought. Matt. xv. 22—28. It is such importunate prayer that takes the kingdom of heaven by violence.

(3) That *our expectations from God should be enlarged.* To pray "as we ought," we must desire much and hope for much. We must believe in God's truth and goodness, in Christ's alsufficiency and willingness to save. 'Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.' We must pray always, and not faint; and then like Jacob we shall prevail. This however is the manner of prayer for which we feel our insufficiency, and need the influence of the Holy Spirit. We find it difficult, as Job did, to order our speech aright before him, by reason of darkness; but if we possess the spirit of faith, we shall prevail notwithstanding.

(4) That we urge *those pleas which God delights to honour.* What these are we may see in some examples of successful prayer, and shall find that they were all derived from the honour and glory of God, his covenant faithfulness and truth, and the prevailing name of the Lord Jesus. When Moses pleaded for Israel, he pleaded the name and the faithfulness of God. Exod. xxxii. 10—14. When Solomon asked great things for Israel, and that God would forgive his people, his plea is the covenant promise which he had given. 1 Kings viii. 25, 30, 39. Hezekiah did the same, and also the apostles of our Lord, Isai. xxxvii. 14. Acts iv. 30.

II. Observe how much we are indebted to the assistance of the Holy Spirit, in the performance of this important duty.

He is said to "help our infirmities," and to "make intercession for us." Without his influence there is no true prayer: we must pray with the Spirit and with the understanding also. Saul had been in the habit of prayer while a pharisee; yet when he was converted it was said, 'Behold he prayeth,' for he had never truly prayed before. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were no doubt accustomed to attend the worship of the sanctuary; yet it was not till the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them that they began to pray in real earnest. Zech. xii. 10. Nor do believers ever prevail in prayer and supplication, but by his assistance. Such are their "infirmities," their ignorance, weakness, and wanderings of heart.

The "intercession" of the Holy Spirit, is not like that of Christ's: the latter is for us, but this is in us. It is the Holy Spirit that inspires us with a spirit of prayer, and it is he that teaches us both how and what to pray for as we ought. He never excites desires, but such as are according to the will of God. The Lord also is said to know the mind of the Spirit, or what is of his inditing; and knowing this, he will assuredly answer. It is the Holy Spirit that endues the mind with

sacred fervour and earnestness, and furnishes it with sweetness of expression in prayer. When the mind is overwhelmed with grief and anguish, and unable to give utterance to the heart, he interprets "the groans that cannot be uttered, and maketh intercession for us."

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) We are taught to acknowledge our utter insufficiency for what is good, and that the whole of our salvation is of grace. We can do nothing as we ought, and therefore nothing to deserve mercy at the hands of God.

(2) While we feel and own our insufficiency, let us not presume to deny our obligations; for we are not only at the same time to pray, but required to pray as we ought.

(3) We are from hence furnished with a criterion by which to judge of our own religion; for it is here taken for granted that the Lord's people are a praying people, and that they account it good to draw near unto God.

(4) We are here taught to cherish the influence of the Holy Spirit, to depend upon it in the performance of every spititual exerçise, and to admire the infinite compassion of God the Holy Spirit to our manifold infirmities.

IMPORTANCE OF IMPROVING OUR PRESENT ADVANTAGES.

Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.—John xii. 35.

Our blessed Lord was now going up to the feast at Jerusalem, preaching as he went, and all the while with death in view. It was at this feast that he was to suffer, and the time of his departure was now at hand. Yet he met with many cavillers, who believed not on him, though he had done so many miracles among them. They in effect tell him in ver. 34, that the law speaks of the Messiah as abiding forever, yet you speak of the Son of man as dying: who is he then? He cannot be the Messiah! To this objection the words of the text are an answer, in which we see that our Lord refuses to keep up a dispute with cavillers, and proceeds to warn them of their danger, and to exhort them to repentance.

(1) In the words, "a little while," he refers to his own death, which was now approaching, and to what would follow upon it. It is as if he had said, You will not have me long; and the kingdom of God itself will be taken from you, and given to the gentiles.

(2) He does not speak of the light as being extinguished, but as de-

parting from them. It was thought that by putting him to death, they should quench the light which was so offensive to them; but like the sun, he only departed from their hemisphere, to shine still brighter in another. The stone would be made the head of the corner, though rejected by these master builders.

(3) Christ exhorts them to make much of their present mercies. "Walk while ye have the light:" follow its dictates, and make it your guide to an eternal world. I am the light of the world, said he on another occasion: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness.

(4) He warns them of the consequences of neglecting their present mercies and advantages, that "darkness would soon come upon them," and they would not know "whither they were going." They would be stumbling on the dark mountains, not knowing but the next step would plunge them into endless ruin.

This subject is applicable to us, as well as to the Jews. We have at present the light of the gospel, but it will be only for a little time. Those who neglect it may be deprived of it in the present life; or if not, they must soon be taken from it, and sent into a world where its sound shall not be heard. Hear then the voice of Christ: and—

I. Attend to the exhortation: "Walk while he have the light."

In general, take the gospel for your guide to an eternal world, and walk in this light of the Lord. Isai. ii. 5.

More particularly—

1. Beware of *shutting your eyes against the light.* The Jews did this to an awful degree, and their posterity do the same to this day. Acts xxviii. 27. So also do modern deists, and many others who are called christians. They renounce the leading doctrines of the gospel because they do not suit their pride and self-sufficiency. This is often followed with judicial blindness and hardness of heart. John xi. 41.

2. Beware of making *cavilling objections to the gospel*, like what we find in ver. 34. you may read the bible, and find in it nothing but stumbling blocks: and he that goes to it full of his own wisdom will do this. We must become fools that we may be wise, and sit as little children at the feet of Jesus. He that doeth the will of my Father, saith our Lord, shall know of the doctrine that I teach. But instead of this, and instead of walking in the light, there are some whose whole life is spent in forming objections, that 'the ways of the Lord are not equal,' while the true cause will be found to be that 'their ways are not equal.' Where this unbelieving and capacious spirit is cherished, Christ will not condecend to instruct, but proceeds to reprove, and to warn of danger. Beware then, lest ye be given up to stumble, and fall, and perish. Acts xiii. 41.

3. Take heed of treating the gospel merely as *a matter of speculation.* "Walking in the light" is practical and opposed to mere theoretical knowledge. Many who do not openly reject the word, but would seem to be its friends, hearing it from time to time, and perhaps admit and contend for its literal import, yet do it all in a speculative way, and

never walk by it as a light to their feet, and a lamp to their paths. The great point however is, to be doers of the word, and not hearers only; for such shall be blessed in their deed. Truly to walk in the light, is to give up ourselves to be saved and governed by the truth as it is in Jesus, to come to him as weary and heavy laden, and as ready to perish. Matt. xi. 29. The light of the gospel shows us the way of acceptance with God; and he that walks in this light gives up all self-dependance, and trusts alone to the blood of the cross for pardon and eternal life.

II. Attend to the warning given: Walk while ye have the light, "lest darkness come upon you."

Our Lord said this in reference to the present life: the Jews in rejecting him would be left in a state of mental blindness and unbelief: and those who reject the gospel, sink into a state of heathen darkness and irreligion. In proportion also to the degree of light previously enjoyed, such will be the darkness which succeeds. Hence we see some are given up to believe a lie, because they had pleasure in unrighteousness, and the light that is in them is worse than darkness. They walk on not knowing whither they are going. Others become hardened and insensible, blind to their own danger, and beyond the reach of conviction; they scorn to be instructed or reproved. Thus many under the gospel live and die.

Pause then and think, how awful it is to be without the light and the hope of the gospel, so as to know not whither you are going! It is painful to a good man to be without light and comfort, and to be in doubt about his state, though he may be right in the main: but to be in the way to hell, and not know it, is awful beyond description. If we reject the gospel, we are at once involved in heathenism, and at death we go off in the dark; or if any light remains, it is only such as glares into the infernal world, accompanied with a fearful looking for of judgment, and of fiery indignation which shall devour the adversary.

COMPASSION OF GOD TO THE NEEDY AND THE DESTITUTE.

A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land.—Psalm lxviii. 5, 6.

The former verses give a display of the greatness of God, in exercising universal dominion over the whole creation, and represent this as matter of exceeding great joy to the righteous. In the text we are directed to contemplate the goodness and compassion of God to the poor

and needy: 'for though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly.' How sweet is the contrast in ver. 4, 5; and how wonderful the divine compassion!

There are two senses in which the text is eminently true of God:—in a way of providence, and also in a way of grace.

I. View the compassion of God in a way of providence. "A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation."

This is meant of those who are really fatherless, and may also be understood of such as are left destitute and forsaken, even though their fathers are living, as in Psal. xxvii. 10. It is here implied that the widow and the fatherless are generally unprotected, and liable to be oppressed. Such is the state of human nature, that those who are weak and defenceless are in danger of falling a prey to the rich and powerful, from whom they ought rather to expect protection: and even where there is no design to oppress, they are often unknown, overlooked, and forgotten, and treated with wrongs and insults. Now God, even he who rideth upon the heaven of heavens, will have a special regard to such, and be their father and their judge.

1. This is evident from *a law expressly made* in their favour, under the former dispensation, and sanctioned by an awful threatening, in case of their being oppressed. Exod. xxii. 22—25. And though this law was given to the children of Israel, the moral part of it is equally binding upon us, for nothing can be a greater violation of moral principle than a disregard of justice and benevolence.

2. The compassion of God to the widow and the fatherless appears in his making a kind and *merciful spirit towards them* an essential part of christianity itself. James i. 21. This is so necessary to the existence of true religion under every dispensation, that neither our devotion, nor our love to God, will be accounted as any thing, where this disposition is wanting. Benevolence towards men is not indeed the whole of religion, but it is so essential an ingredient in the character of a christian, that none of the other virtues can exist without it: and an apostle infers that where love is, none of the rest are wanting. Rom. xiii. 10.

3. In his *pleading the cause of the oppressed*, and avenging the wrongs that are done them. Psal. ciii. 6. He has done this in numberless instances, and will continue to be their father and their judge. Prov. xxii. 22, 23.

4. In *raising them up friends* that shall feel for them and comfort them. God usually works by second causes, and provides means and instruments for this purpose; and thus he shows favour and compassion to the poor and needy. Instances of this kind are innumerable, and it becomes us to see the hand of God in all. 2 Cor. vii. 6.

5. By *actually providing* for the widow and the fatherless by his overruling providence. How evidently was this the case with respect to Hagar, and her son Ishmael, in the wilderness. Gen. xxi. 14—20. The widow of Sarepta was preserved in a time of famine, by the Lord's

sending to her Elijah the prophet, to multiply the cruse of oil that it might not fail. 1 Kings xvii. In a similar manner the Shunamite and her son found mercy, in a time of great affliction. 2 Kings iv. 1—7. In short, he pities and blesses all who put their trust in him, for he is 'the Saviour of all men, but especially of those that believe.'

Another instance of his compassion towards the same characters, is, that "he setteth the solitary in families." The lonely and the destitute are often thus provided for; and if we are blessed with agreeable connections and friends, it is the Lord's doing, and to him alone the praise is due.

Again: "He bringeth out those which are bound with chains." The Lord looseth the prisoner, and preserveth such as are appointed to die. All that is good, beneficent and kind, is to be ascribed to him: the compassion of creatures is nothing but a stream issuing from the fountain of mercy.

"But the rebellious dwell in a dry land." Here the opposite character is intended, such as oppress the poor and needy; and to them is appointed a miserable portion even in this life. With all their unjust gains they are not so well off as the widow and the fatherless who trust in God, even though they be poor and mean. The text may also apply to "rebellious" children, in contradistinction to the "fatherless:" these shall never prosper, but "dwell in a dry land." The Lord generally shows his displeasure against impious and disobedient children, and punishes them with a succession of evils in the methods of his providence. Prov. xxx. 17.

II. Consider the compassion of God towards the needy and the destitute, in the dispensations of his grace.

Viewed as sinners, we are all like fatherless children, or orphans in the world. We are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, without God, and without hope. We are like the outcast whom no one pitied, Ezek. xvi. 5: we have ruined ourselves, and there is none to save. But in the helpless state, God acts the part of a father towards us. Hos. xiv. 3. He adopts us into his family, gives us a goodly heritage and makes us sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. Jer. iii. 19. 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. If we cannot with confidence call him our Father, we may at least plead that we are fatherless without him. Lam. v. 1—3.

(1) We may learn from hence what true religion is. It is to be like God, to feel and act in some measure as he does; to be merciful, even as our Father who is in heaven is merciful. Matt. v. 45—48. Let no man deceive himself with notions of piety, while a stranger to genuine benevolence, for this is made essential to the character of the elect of God. Col. iii. 12. 1 John iii. 17.

(2) What encouragement is here to trust in God, under the most painful bereavements. What a consolation to the truly godly when they come to die, and leave behind them their dearest friends and fatherless children in an evil world! Jer. xlix. 11. God will be their father, their protector, and their judge. Psal. x. 14, 17, 18.

JONAH'S DESPONDENCY.

Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight: yet will I look again towards thy holy temple.—Jonah ii. 4.

The Scriptures furnish but little narrative of the prophets, but the book of Jonah is chiefly in the form of a history. It narrates with great distinctness the leading circumstances of a particular prophecy, which was delivered against what was then considered the metropolis of the heathen world, the city of Nineveh, and the head of the Assyrian empire.

This brief but interesting history shows us, that God was not unmindful of the heathen at this early period. The people of Israel were God's witnesses, and the fear of them was impressed upon the surrounding nations, as appears by the effect produced upon the mariners who accompanied Jonah to Tarshish, and also upon the Ninevites by the ministry of the prophet. The former 'feared exceedingly,' when they found that he was the servant of Jehovah; and the latter repented in sackcloth and ashes.

Jonah's being raised up for the express purpose of going with God's message to the Ninevites, seems to have been a presage of gospel times, when the word of truth should be sent to all nations by the ministry of the apostles, who were especially commissioned to carry the tidings of salvation to the gentiles.

The text in its connection states the very crisis of Jonah's affliction, when on the borders of despair, and the means by which that despair was prevented.

(1) We see the disobedient prophet fleeing from God, and going in a way opposite to that which he was directed to pursue. God sent him to Nineveh, but he went down to Tarshish.

(2) A tempest is sent in pursuit of him. He who holds the winds in his fists, and the waters in the hollow of his hand, gives commission for both to overtake and chastise the disobedient prophet.

(3) All the parties were alarmed, except himself, for he was asleep at the bottom or in the hold of the ship. Jonah is reproved for his stupidity by the heathen mariners, is afterwards taken by lot, confessing his country, his religion, and his sin, and in the sequel, reads his own condemnation. We see humanity struggling for his deliverance, but in vain. We witness the apparent conversion of the heathen sailors, and hear them cry to Heaven for mercy; while the prophet of the Lord is prayerless and unaffected. What a load of guilt must at this moment press upon his conscience! In this state he is at length cast into the sea: now he sinks, and is swallowed up by an inhabitant of the deep. Afterwards, when recovered from this state, he wrote the account, and tells us what passed in that perilous situation.

The text describes him as sinking in despair; but at the last moment a ray of hope darts into his soul, and he is saved from destruction.

I. Notice a few things in the case of Jonah relative to his despair.

His state of mind is depicted in very affecting language: "I said, I am cast out of thy sight."

1. Observe the *import of the expression.* It is not to be taken literally; for whither can we flee from his presence? Psal. cxxxix. 7—12. The expression no doubt alludes to the practice of princes and great men, who admit their friends and favourites into their presence, and banish offenders from their sight. Thus a highly favoured land is said to have the eyes of the Lord continually upon it, Deut. xi. 12; and a people who had greatly offended are cast out of his sight. 2 Kings xvii. 18, xxiv. 3. Jonah had been highly favoured in several respects. He was an Israelite, a worshipper of the true God: and now he is cast away, and must die amongst heathen idolaters, and no eye to pity him. He was a prophet, and sent as God's ambassador: but now he must be cast off, and God will employ him no more. He was a religious character, had enjoyed communion with God, and possessed the hope of eternal life: but what could he think now, and whither must he flee for refuge!

2. The *awfulness of that event* which he anticipated—to be "cast out of God's sight," and to see his face no more! Without this the world would be nothing: but he is also cast out of the world. This is the very essence of all misery, of final destruction; to be banished from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. Yet all this did the unhappy prophet now anticipate; and no wonder therefore that he is overwhelmed.

3. Mark *the correspondence* between the punishment and the offence. Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord, and now the Lord departs from him. He disobeys the voice of the Lord, and now his voice must not be heard. He is cast out, and no power can save him.

4. *The excess* to which his fears had driven him: he is now on the very borders of despair. "I said," I am cast out of thy sight. But it was not really so, though he said it, and thought it had been so. It was the language of his fears; and happy for him that it was beyond the truth. Others also have said the same concerning themselves, and were mistaken. Psal. lxxvii. 7—10.

5. *The piety* which is nevertheless discovered in the prophet's *complaint.* It is not so much the punishment of sense as of loss that is included in it, and this is what most deeply affected him. Wicked men would have felt the former only, as Cain and Judas; but to be deprived of God's presence and blessing, is what a good man cannot bear. Psal. lxiii. 3. lxxiii. 25.

Proceed to notice the hope, though faint, which Jonah cherished while in this desponding state. "Yet will I look again towards thy holy temple."

(1) It was not the *temple* as a material building to which he looked, but as God's dwelling-place; particularly, as the residence of the ark and the mercy seat, from whence he communed with his people. As

the substance of these types and symbols, Christ is the true propitiatory, to which sinners must look for acceptance with God. Rom. iii. 25. 1 John ii. 1.

(2) Looking to the temple had *the promise* of prayer being heard and answered, and this it was that encouraged the prophet to direct his eye towards that holy place. 1 Kings viii. 38, 39. Psal. v. 7.

(3.) This was not *the first time* that Jonah had prayed with his face towards Jerusalem, and therefore he encourages himself to look "again." He who has once tried this means of relief, cannot but try it again; prayer is the only balm to a wounded spirit. What a mercy is it, not to be a stranger to this holy exercise, and to know where to look and whither to go in a time of trouble.

II. Endeavour to derive some instruction from the subject.

1. We are warned not to draw any positive conclusion, *as to the state of the departed.* Had we been left to decide on Jonah's case at the time he was cast into the sea, we should have entertained but little hope of his salvation. Considering him dying as it were in a state of impenitence, and in the very act of disobedience to God, we should have thought him an apostate, and gone to perdition. What took place after he was cast away, and cast out of God's sight as he thought, was all concealed from human eyes, and therefore left no room for the exercise of human judgment.

2. Let us beware of *disobeying* the divine command, and of *fleeing* from the presence of the Lord. If we neglect his service, and turn our back upon his work; if we rebel against his word, or neglect to seek his glory; we may expect to be cast out of his sight. They that observe lying vanities, forsake their own mercies.

3. If any have sinned, yet let them *not despair.* So long as we are out of hell, there is hope concerning us, hope in God through a Mediator. There is a mercy seat to which we may repair, and we are invited to come boldly to it, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. Heb. iv. 16. An Intercessor also is provided, who can save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. Heb. vii. 25.

4. If any have lost *the light of God's countenance*, and are walking in darkness, let them seek it in the way they first obtained it, and look "again" towards his holy temple. Let them come as poor and wretched, and ready to perish. There is still a temple, an altar, and a mercy seat.

CHRIST THE LIFE AND PORTION OF HIS PEOPLE.

He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life.—1 John v. 12.

The apostle John delights to speak of Christ, and to dwell upon the glory of his character as the Son of God. He often introduces him under this appellation, and it is with a view to exalt him that he thus speaks of him in the text. The import of this language is, If you have but Christ, you have every thing; but without him, whatever else you may possess, you have nothing. All that is good and desirable is denoted by the term "life," and not merely a perpetuity of existence.

I. Enquire what it is to "have the Son of God."

In general it denotes a specific interest or propriety in him as our portion, to possess or to enjoy him as our own. More particularly—

1. This language implies that Christ is *the gift of God*, that he might be the portion of them that believe. He became man, lived and died, rose and ascended, not for himself, but for others. As the head does not exist for itself, but for the body, and the stock for the branches; so Christ did nothing, suffered nothing for himself, but for us.

2. It is implied that Christ is the great *depository of divine riches*, for it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell. Col. i. 19. ii. 9. He is all that to us, and much more, which Joseph was to the Egyptians: all our supplies must come from him, and out of his fulness we receive, and grace for grace. John i. 16.

3. It is implied that we have *actually received Christ* by faith, for what is here taught is true only of them that believe, and they only have the promise of eternal life. The origin and first cause of an interest in Christ, is God's electing grace and love; but this is only made manifest by effectual calling, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost It is impossible that it should be otherwise, or that we should "have the Son" till we have really received him, and that can only be by faith. John iii. 36. We cannot have Christ, and at the same time have what is the opposite to him. He who trusts in his own righteousness for acceptance with God, can have no interest in the righteousness of Christ, for the former involves a rejection of the latter, and so an exclusion from its benefits. Rom. x. 3, 4. He whose heart is set upon the world for his portion, can have no part in Christ, for it is impossible to serve two masters, or to have both Christ and mammon. Faith in Christ includes a renunciation of all things for his sake, and we shall not otherwise be accounted worthy of him. Those who make him their portion must make him their all in all.

II. The connection there is between this and eternal salvation. "He that hath the Son, hath life."

The favour of God, and the enjoyment of all spiritual blessings, are comprehended in the life that is here promised, as in John xvii. 3.

1. The order *established in the Scriptures is*, that having Christ should precede our having life. Christ is God's unspeakable gift, his first and primary gift, to an impoverished and ruined world: and having given him, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things. Rom. viii. 32. As this gift takes precedence of all the rest, both in point of magnitude and in order of time; so our reception of it must take the lead of all the rest. Hence it is that to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God; and this order cannot be reversed. John i. 12. The branch must be united to the vine, before it can derive life and nourishment from it; and union with Christ must in the order of things precede every other blessing. Our justification and sanctification are both from hence. Rom. viii. 1. 1 Cor. i. 21. Phil. iii. 8.

2. There is a fitness in all this, because *Christ is the great medium* of life and salvation to a lost and ruined world. It is by his sufferings and death that life is obtained, and through his mediation it is bestowed. Appearing as our substitute, the chastisement of our peace was laid on him, and by his stripes we are healed. He who was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich. Now it is that God delights to bestow every spiritual blessing on us, in reward of his obedience; and thus he gives eternal life. Receiving Christ, we are treated as being his, as Pharaoh treated Joseph's brethren because they were his. God hath made a covenant of life with us through him, and given us all things for his sake. 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

3. Christ is not only the medium of life, *but life itself*, even that eternal life which was with the Father, and is manifested unto us. 1 John i. 2. Christ is our life, our heaven, and our all. Col. iii. 1—3. What we have of life in this world is from him, and it will be the same in the world to come. John xi. 25.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) Consider *the blessedness* of having Christ for our portion. If we have but little else, yet this will be enough, an ample portion. Every thing is Christ's, for he is heir of all things; and if we have him, all things become ours. Our great concern therefore should be to recieve Christ, and to be satisfied with nothing short of an interest in him.

(2) The *awful state* of being without Christ, without hope, without God in the world. Such is the condition of all unbelievers; for he that "hath not the Son of God, hath not life." No matter what else we have, if we have not him; whether it be wealth or honour, or even the greatest stock of good works. All will avail us nothing; there will be no real or substantial good in this world, and none in the world to come.

(3) How delusive and how dangerous is that system of religion, which has not Christ for its living and animating principle. How unlike the gospel which John preached, and how alien from the life of christian piety. Let us beware of every principle that would lessen the importance of Christ's mediation, or find a substitute for the doctrine of the cross, the only medium of life to a dying world.

HOW TO LAY UP TREASURES IN HEAVEN.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.—Matthew vi. 19, 20.

Our Lord intended in these words to check that inordinate attachment to the things of this life, and that eager pursuit of them, which we too frequently witness. He did not mean that it would be absolutely unlawful to lay up treasure on earth, either for ourselves or our families: on the contrary, this is what the Scriptures both admit and require in certain cases, and for certain purposes. They teach us that though children are not to lay up for their parents, yet that parents are to lay up for their children, 2 Cor. xii. 14: and more than this, that we are to provide for our own house, and to give to him that needeth. 2 Tim. v. 8. But if nothing were provided we should have nothing to give, either to our children, or to any one besides.

The text therefore is designed to show, that our hearts must not be set on these things, but rather on things that are above, while the world finds only a subordinate place in our esteem. Much less are we to lay up treasure on earth, when we ought to lay it out for God, and in acts of justice and of mercy towards men.

To "lay up treasure in heaven," does not mean any thing like merit and desert, as if there could be any proportion between what we do in this world, and what we shall enjoy in the next. But in order to encourage us, God has promised a crown of life, and represented us as winning and obtaining it. He also condescends to speak of it as a reward, and of what we do for him as sowing to the Spirit, that of the Spirit, we may reap life everlasting.

From the whole we are led to the following observation—

I. That to lay out ourselves for God, is to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

The heavenly state admits of different degrees of glory; and if in proportion as we have laboured and suffered for God in this world, we shall enjoy him in the next; then it will follow, that whatever we now do for the divine glory is sowing seed for the final harvest, and laying up for ourselves treasure in heaven.

We may endeavour to illustrate this idea a little more particularly, by considering wherein the heavenly glory will consist—

1. One part of it will consist in our being *approved of God*, and receiving that divine commendation, 'Well done, good and faithful servant;' or as Paul expresses it 'in having praise of God.' 1 Cor. iv. 5. Enoch is said to have had that testimony on earth, Heb. xi. 5; and all that have served the Lord in truth shall have it in heaven,

and this will be heaven itself. Now it is easy to see that in proportion as we have been faithful and diligent, we shall enjoy the divine approbation; and so we may perceive in what manner treasure is laid up in heaven. Our Lord has also encouraged this idea, by his intended commendation of all acts of kindness and good will shown to his afflicted and suffering people. Matt. xxv. 34—36.

2. The heavenly glory will consist *in loving God*, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as well as in being loved and approved of him: and then of course the more we have done for the glory of God, the more the rememberance of it will rejoice our hearts, and encrease our love towards him. The same thing that made us rejoice in his service here, will make us hereafter to rejoice that we have ever served him. And as love here makes us to rejoice even in tribulation, if God may but be glorified; so love will there make us to rejoice that ever we were counted worthy to suffer for his sake. It is thus that our present sufferings for him will work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; and by serving and suffering in his cause, we may lay up treasures in heaven. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

3. Another part of heaven will consist *in giving glory to God and the Lamb*, as it is described in Rev. v. 12—14. But this must be in proportion as we have glory to give. He that has laboured much f God has obtained more crowns than others, and the more we have obtained the more we shall have to cast at his feet. When we hear such a one as Paul saying, 'By the grace of God I am what I am,' there is a great deal more meaning in the words than there could be in the lips of most other men. Those who shall have crowns from the number of converts, who shall be their crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus, will have greater honour to ascribe to him, and more numerous trophies to lay at his feet. In the same proportion they will have a richer portion to enjoy. 1 Thess. ii 19, 20.

4. Another part will consist *in exploring the wonders of his love to us:* and what spiritual knowledge we have obtained here, will meeten us in part of this delightful employment. It is of the nature of holy and heavenly wisdom to expand the soul, and render it susceptible of higher enjoyments; and the more we have been conversant with the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, the richer will be our satisfaction when we shall be made to comprehend it in the light of eternal glory. Ephes. iii. 18, 19. Let us therefore be encouraged to search the Scriptures, and dig the mines of revelation, that we may lay up treasure in heaven. Prov. ii. 3—5.

5. The glory of heaven will consist in *reviewing the works of God* as one glorious system, in tracing causes and effects, and seeing the wonderful events that have resulted from small beginnings. Amidst an endless series, it will form no inconsiderable part of our felicity to contemplate the blessed effects of our own labours, if we have done any thing for God, and to witness the astonishing and unexpected result. Isai. xlix. 21. It was a part of the joy set before Christ when he had to endure the cross, that he should see of the travail of his soul; and it will be so with his faithful servants. Isai. liii. 10, 11. Heb. xii. 2. What a heaven it must be to such a one as Paul, to see all that God

has done by his means, by his preaching and by his writings. Every one also who has laboured with fidelity in a humbler sphere, shall partake of the same joy and blessedness. Matt. xxv 21.

II. Notice the manner in which the exhortation in the text is enforced.

The principal idea is, that things laid up on earth are not safe, ver. 19; but things laid up in heaven are out of the reach of danger, "where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal."

1. The things of this life carry in them *a principle of corruption*, but those of another life are incorruptible and eternal. There is a worm at the root of every earthly good, and they all 'perish with the using.' Lay not up your treasure here therefore, but let your affections be placed on what will last for ever.

2. The things of this life are exposed to *invasion from without*, as well as to internal corruption and decay, for "thieves break through and steal;" but the things of another life are secure from all these dangers. Not only is our worldly property liable to various depredations and losses from wicked and unreasonable men, but all our enjoyments are subject to invasion from various other quarters. Losses and disappointments break in upon us, and sweep away that which groweth out of the dust. Afflictions rob us of our hopes, and death deprives us of our worldly all. But it is not so in heaven: the wreck of nature itself will not affect our spiritual and everlasting portion. The hope that is laid up for us will neither deceive nor disappoint, but shall be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

END OF THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED.

I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.—Psalm xxxvii. 35—37.

The Scriptures every where preserve that great and important distinction of character, which divides the whole of mankind in all ages, and which alone shall exist in the last day—the righteous and the wicked. This too is mentioned in such a manner, as if no account at all was to be made of any other distinction. In the concerns of the present life men are distinguished by nation, by birth, by rank and title; but God distinguishes them only by character, for he is no respecter of persons.

It is also observable, what importance is attached to the "end" of things; and we are always taught, that only is well which ends well. Here is exhibited the end of two different characters; the one is that of a great man, perhaps a nobleman or a prince, high in the esteem of the

world, and quite an object of envy. But what is his end? "He passed away, and lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." Here is another, of whom nothing is said, but that he was "perfect and upright." Probably he was an object of pity, if not of contempt, in the eye of the world. But what then? "His end was peace."

I. View the character and end of him, whom the world in general look upon with envy.

1. Much is said of his *present glory and prosperity.* Probably he was born of wealthy parents, was nursed up in the lap of fortune, educated in the best manner that his age or country could afford. He enters upon life with every flattering prospect: and thus far, what is there to censure or to blame? Nothing: it is Providence that raises him up, and gives him an elevated station. Some few of the Lord's servants have also been thus honoured. But he is *wicked.* It is said of Naaman the Assyrian that he was a mighty man of valour, 'but he was a leper.' What is here said of the rich and prosperous man is much worse; and it shows that God often gives the greatest worldly advantages to the worst of men. He is described as in the plenitude of power, and that power increasing; so that he "spread himself on every side like a green bay tree." Perhaps his power and influence were gained by oppression, like Haman; or by conquest, like Sennacherib. In every thing his plans succeeded according to his wishes. Isai. x. 14. The comparison is remarkably apt and suitable: he is like an evergreen which sees no change, but brings forth no fruit to God; beautiful in appearance, but altogether unprofitable.

2. Nothing is said of *the good he had done,* with all his power and prosperity. It was a trust committed to him by the great Proprietor of all things, but he lived to himself, and without God in the world. As to mankind, he was either a terror to those about him, or if beneficent and kind, it was merely for his own sake, or to gratify the love of popularity. It is truly affecting to observe the miserable use which great men generally make of their riches and their influence.

3. The account given of *his end is truly alarming.* He is supposed on a sudden to depart, as if by a blast, or some hand unseen. There seems to be a studied silence about his death: perhaps some things the writer could not say, and others he might not wish to say. He could not say that he died much lamented, that the poor wept over his grave, or that he had any good hope of eternal life. Other things which he might have said, he passes over in silence. He could have said as our Lord did of the *rich man* after his death, 'that in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments;' or as Asaph did of the ungodly who prosper in the world, 'thou castedst them down into destruction, they are brought into desolation as in a moment, and are utterly consumed with terrors.' Psal. lxxiii. 18—20. But the sacred writer is silent, and this silence speaks much. Such is the end, the fatal end of thousands whom the world applaud, but whom the christian has no reason to envy: ver. 1—3.

II. Consider the character and end of him, whom the world in general look upon with pity and contempt.

1. Nothing is said of his *outward circumstances*, but merely of his character. He might be affluent, or he might not; a proof this, that true blessedness does not consist in worldly circumstances. Many of the poor, the persecuted and despised, have been found amongst the contented, and the most blessed. But he was "upright and perfect," though not free from sin; the expression being employed in the Old Testament to denote a sincere and genuine believer, or one whose heart is perfect with God, and whose life is upright and blameless before men.

2. It seems almost implied that he had but *little peace in this world*, at least this is often the case with such as fear God. The Lord's people have been hated by the world in all ages; they wandered about, like the patriarchs, without any certain dwelling-place. Two things however are said of this good man which are worthy of notice—

(1) His heart was *perfect* with God, and his life was *upright* before men. This is a high commendation, especially to continue so all through the trials and temptations of life. This is an attainment which but few have made.

(2) *His end was peace*. He had what Paul desired; he 'finished his course with joy,' and died in peace with God and man. Not that he indulged in self-righteous pride, but was filled with grateful satisfaction.

Such has been the happy end of many who were but little known in the world. They have lived in obscurity, and their religious profession has scarcely been heard of beyond the immediate sphere of their acquaintance, but they have closed their eyes in peace, and silently slept in Jesus. Their life may have been full of trouble, and they have come up out of great tribulation, but have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb: therefore are they before the throne.

Oh of what importance is it to attend to the advice given us in different parts of this psalm, to trust in the Lord, and to delight ourselves in him: ver. 3—6.

THE BACKSLIDER'S LAMENTATION.

My wounds stink and are corrupt, because of my foolishness.—Psalm xxxviii. 5.

This is one of the sorrowful psalms of David, written soon after his fall; or, as it was "to bring to remembrance," it might be some time afterwards, that his soul might still be humbled within him. He was long under chastisement for his sin, and to a late period of life he still tastes the wormwood and the gall.

In the text the psalmist describes himself as full of diseases, not so

much in body as in mind. Sin may be but little thought of at the time it is committed, but afterwards it will prove a loathsome disease, and a source of unutterable anguish.

Three things are remarkable in this complaint—The afflicted state of the penitent, the long continuance of his grief and trouble, and the cause to which it is ascribed.

I. The mournful condition of the penitent, full of "wounds" and putrifying sores.

He is afflicted by the remembrance of his former iniquity, and by a sense of divine displeasure. 'There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger, neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin:' ver. 3.

1. In reference to *his sin*, he seems to compare himself to one who had fallen down a precipice, and broken all his bones; and now he is agonised with pain, and full of trouble. Such in reality is the state of man as a sinner, fallen from God: and when awakened to a true sense of our moral condition, such will be our feelings, wounded with grief, and overwhelmed with trouble. Such also will be the case with those who have sinned, and have not repented, when God comes to lay his afflicting hand upon them and to deal with them in his hot displeasure. Sometimes these falls are sudden, like David's, and yet are full of evil. Sometimes they are more gradual, from one sin to another, and from one degree of declension to another, like a lost sheep that is straying farther and farther from the shepherd and the flock. The former of these are by the lusts of the flesh, the latter by the lusts of the mind: the former are more visible and open, but the latter are not less dangerous. Pride, covetousness, vain company, and love of the present world, all have a tendency to alienate the heart from God, and so to prepare the way for some dreadful fall.

2. Another cause of complaint was, *a sense of divine displeasure.* 'Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore:' ver. 2. Such is the remembrance of God's precepts, warnings, threatenings and rebukes in providence, all of which call up our sins, and place them in array before us. Such were the words of Christ to Peter, and the look which he gave him in the hall of the high priest. David met with many troubles in his own family, to call sin to remembrance; such as the death of Absalom, and the curses of Shimei. Such also are the reproaches of enemies, the admonitions of friends, and the unkindnesses we may meet with from both: ver. 11, 12.

II. The long continuance of his grief and trouble.

David not only compares himself to a man full of wounds and bruises, but to one whose sores, instead of being healed, grow worse and worse, till at length they become loathsome to himself, and to all about him. A wound at any time is dangerous, but one of long standing is still more so.

This describes the case of one who has sinned, and has not repented,

like the backslider who goes on still in the frowardness of his heart.

The symptoms of this case are, when the evil is not relinquished, but there is a returning to it on almost every new temptation; or only outwardly refraining from it, for fear of disgrace; and then the study will be, rather to conceal than to avoid the evil. So difficult is the work of true repentance, and of fully turning to the Lord. Psal. li. 2, 10.

III. The cause to which this continuance is ascribed: "because of my foolishness."

All sin is folly, and this is the origin of all our diseases. But David does not here reflect so much on himself for bringing these troubles upon him, as for their continuing unhealed. It was owing, as he acknowledges, to some "guile" which he indulged; his keeping silence, instead of making at once an ingenuous confession. Psal. xxxii. 2, 3. All this was "foolishness," for God knows his sin, and the state of his heart. Wisdom would have led him to say as he did afterwards, 'I will declare mine iniquity, I will be sorry for my sin:' ver. 18.

(1) We here see the way to obtain a cure for our spiritual diseases, and that is by confessing our sins, and coming to Jesus; whether it be under our first awakenings, or afterwards.

(2) Every thing short of this is mere folly, and tends to death. All attempts at self-justification, or even to palliate the evil, are destructive, and still shows the individual to be in a backsliding state; and while in that state he should not be comforted.

PERFECT INNOCENCE AND PURITY OF CHRIST'S CHARACTER.

Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.—1 Peter ii. 22.

Pregnant as the gospel is with a variety of interesting and important truths, it will be found that the greater part of them refer to Christ. His character and work, his deity and humanity, his life and death, are the great points on which the sacred writers delight to dwell. These also are the leading subjects on which every christian minister is required to dwell. Nothing is so essential to a life of piety, or more adapted to awaken and convince the unbeliever.

The subject now presented to our meditation is, the perfect innocence and purity of the life and character of Christ. Here it will be proper to notice the evidences of this interesting fact, and then the purposes to which it may be applied.

I. Establish the truth contained in the text, by exhibiting some of the evidences by which it is supported.

We may feel satisfied that Jesus was indeed 'holy, harmless, and undefiled,' and we have good reason to be satisfied of this; yet it is of some importance to be able to prove it; and it may not be uninteresting briefly to review the different parts of our Lord's conduct for the purpose of feeling the force of the testimony that is here borne concerning him.

1. *His friends*, who knew the most of him, and who published an account of his life, describe him as innocent and faultless. His disciples were continually with him, beholding his conduct, and witnessing both his private retirements and his public walk; and they have all borne testimony to the same effect. We are born in sin, shapen in iniquity, and are by nature children of wrath; but it was not so with Jesus. He was born without sin, and was holy from his birth. Luke i. 35. John tells us that no one could accuse him of sin: ch. viii. 46. Paul tells us that he knew no sin. 1 Cor. v. 21. Peter, that he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. Others who do not directly mention the fact, write of him as one that was without blame, which they never do when speaking of any other person; and they are all remarkable for the impartiality of their testimony.

2. *His worst enemies* have never been able to substantiate a single charge against him. He himself challenged the Jews, his bitterest adversaries to do this; and what gives additional weight to this evidence is, that Christ had at that time severely reproved them, and in the most pointed manner. John viii. 44—46. If therefore there had been any thing, they would have found it out. The apostles also made nearly the same challenge on his behalf, after his resurrection, calling him in their address 'the holy child Jesus,' while they charged the Jews with having denied 'the holy one and the just.' Acts iii. 14. iv. 30.

It is true he was slandered as 'a wine bibber and a gluttonous man,' but it was his love to souls, that subjected him to this reproach. He was also accused of 'blasphemy,' in that being a man he made himself God. John v. 18. x. 33. Nor could he be acquitted of the charge, if the supposition were true, that he is only a mere man; and those who maintained this doctrine must also maintain that the Jews committed no sin in putting him to death, and that he died as a blasphemer. But if he were indeed equal with God, by being truly the Son of God in his divine nature, it was not blasphemy for him to affirm it, and the charge itself is utterly groundless.

Even the enemies of Christ at this day are not able to bring against him a railing accusation; but while they hate the gospel, and do all they can to hinder its progress, they are compelled to admit the unspotted purity of his character.

3. *Jesus himself*, who was never known to boast, bore the same witness. 'The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.' John xiv. 30. He also exhibited himself as a model for all his followers. Matt. xi. 29, 30; and testified that he did always those things that were pleasing in the sight of God. John viii. 29. Paul indeed on some occasions bore a similar testimony concerning himself,

but he had also to confess and mourn over the depravity of his own heart. 1 Thess. ii. 10. Rom. vii. 14.

4. *The temptations* he underwent, afforded proof of his unspotted purity. These will serve to exhibit his character to still greater advantage; for though tempted in all points like as we are, he was yet without sin. Heb. iv. 15. Seasons of temptation in the lives of men are commonly very dark seasons, and often leave a blot behind them. But it was not so with our blessed Lord; his temptations tended rather to display his purity, than to obscure it.

He endured the temptation of *poverty and want*, knew what it was to be hungry and thirsty, not having where to lay his head; yet he bore it without repining and discontent. He wrought miracles to supply the wants of others, but none to supply his own. Satan tempted him to this, but he resisted it. Matt. iv. 3. Worldly honours were offered him, not only by the tempter, but by the Jewish populace, who wanted to make him king; but secular pomp and dignity had no charms for him. John vi. 15.

He underwent *reproach and persecution*, but 'when reviled he reviled not again.' When brought before Herod and Pilate he betrayed no signs of fear, but amidst all the scorn and contempt with which they treated him, his tranquility was undisturbed. When buffeted and spit upon in the palace of the high priest, he meditated no revenge; when mocked and insulted by the soldiers, and derided while hanging on the cross, he prayed for them, and made intercession for the transgressors.

II. Consider to what purposes the important truth in the text may be applied.

1. If the life of Jesus was perfectly holy and undefiled, then *the gospel must be true.* If the gospel be not true, then Christ must have been a deceiver; but where shall such another impostor be found? Many deceivers have entered into the world, but they have all been men of wicked lives: such was Mahomed, and many others. But if the fact recorded in the text be true, then all is true that Christ has done and taught; and from hence we derive substantial evidence of the truth of christianity.

2. On this depends *Christ's fitness for the whole of his undertaking* on our behalf. He could not himself have been a Mediator, if he had ever offended; neither could Moses, if he had been an idolater at mount Horeb. But 'thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity.' Psal. xlv. 7. He could not have been a high priest, if he had not been holy, harmless, and undefiled. Heb. vii. 26—28. Neither could his sacrifice have been accepted, if it had not been without blemish and without spot. 2 Cor. v. 21. 1 Pet. i. 19.

3. On this perfect purity depended Christ's fitness to become *our pattern and example.* God hath predestinated us to be conformed to the image of his Son; it required therefore that he should be the model and the standard of all perfection. Had we been appointed to be conformed to any of the sons of Adam, where could one be found that

is unexceptionable, or wholly worthy of imitation; seeing that all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. But Jesus could say with infinite propriety, 'learn of me;' and Paul could admonish us to be followers of him as dear children. Matt. xi. 29. Ephes. v. 1.

(1) We learn from hence, what it is to be a true believer. It is to be like Christ, and to walk even as he walked. Let no man deceive himself with speculative notions, however accurate; nothing but a practical conformity to Christ can be accepted as the criterion of true religion. Whose image therefore and superscription do we bear?

(2) How worthy is Jesus of our entire love and approbation. Many of the saints are possessed of lovely qualities; but of no one can it be said, as of him, that he is 'altogether lovely.' Thou art fairer than the children of men, grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever. Psal. xlv. 2.

THE MERCY OF GOD IN SHORTENING OUR AFFLICTIONS.

I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.—Isaiah lvii. 16.

In this chapter there are many awful threatenings against the people of Israel, but mixed with tender mercy towards the godly among them; and though they also are doomed to go into captivity, yet a way should be prepared for their return: ver. 14. During their captivity they would be greatly tried, but God would lay no more upon them than he would enable them to bear, and would also dwell with them as a comforter: ver. 15.

In the text it is supposed,

(1) That God sometimes *contends with his people*. He has no where promised them an exemption from trouble, but given them to expect it. Being sons, they are not to be without chastisement; and if they sin, he will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Psal. lxxxix. 32.

(2) He will *not contend for ever*, though his hand may be heavy upon them: and the prospect of all our troubles having an end, is one means of supporting us under them. In this lies the principal difference between the sorrows of the righteous and the wicked; the former are but for a moment, while the latter are only the beginning of sorrows.

(3) The reason of God's forbearance is taken from the *infirmities of our nature*, and our being the work of his hands. He knows our frame, and remembers that we are dust; and this is especially the case in his dealings with them that fear him. Psal. lxxviii. 38, 39. ciii. 13—16. Even in the destruction of the wicked and incorrigible, the Lord acts as it were reluctantly, saying, 'What shall I do unto thee, and how shall I give thee up?' Hos. xi. 8. He hath no pleasure in the death of the

wicked, but had rather he would turn from his iniquities and live. What evil there must be in sin, that can extinguish all this compassion, so that he who made them will not have mercy upon them, and he that formed them will 'show them no favour.' Isai. xxvii. 11.

Endeavour briefly to review the mercy of God to his people, in shortening and thereby alleviating their afflictions, whenever he contends with them.

I. View the conduct of God towards his people collectively, in confirmation of the truth taught us in the text.

The history of the people of Israel affords numerous examples of God's contending with them, but there is always a mixture of mercy and judgment in all his afflictive dispensations.

1. The first time that God remarkably contended with Israel, was on the occasion of *the golden calf at Horeb.* The anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and he sent a plague among the people, and many of them were consumed. But at the intercession of Moses he pardoned them, and the plague was stayed. Exod. xxxiii.

2. Another instance of divine displeasure was on account of *Korah and his company*, who offered false fire before the Lord, and profaned his sanctuary. On this occasion the Lord sent an earthquake and swallowed them up: but Aaron ran with a censer in his hand, and stood between the living and the dead, and the divine anger was appeased. Num. xvi.

3. Afterwards they were bitten with *fiery serpents*, for loathing the light food. But even then the Lord appointed a serpent of brass to be elevated in sight of the camp, that whosoever looked thereon might live. Num. xxi. John iii. 14.

4. In the times of *the judges of Israel*, the Lord frequently contended with his people, and he 'smote them, and was wroth.' But he soon raised them up deliverers, and would not suffer them to be oppressed. Judges ii. 14—18.

5. During *the captivity in Babylon*, God contended yet more with his people, and they were chastised beyond any former instance. But this did not last for ever; they were banished from his presence, and from the holy land, but it was only for seventy years. God then heard the prayer of Daniel and others on their behalf, and brought them back again to their own land.

6. The wrath of God has continued longer over the people of the Jews *since the coming of Christ*, than at any former period. This is the most awful visitation that ever was witnessed by that people, but it is for the most awful of all transgressions, the crucifixion and rejection of the Son of God. Yet even this is not to be perpetual; a time will come when Judah and Ephraim shall go and weep together, and seek the Lord; and the Lord will again acknowledge them to be his people. Jer. l. 4, 5. Ezek. xxxvii. 21, 22.

II. If we consider the subject in reference to the people of God individually, we shall witness the same result.

1. God generally contends with us for a time *under first convictions of sin*, but it is only till we are truly inclined to embrace the gospel way of salvation. Many are unable to find rest or peace to their souls, while earnestly seeking after it; but the reason is, they do not sufficiently feel their need of a Saviour, so as to take up their rest in him. Or if doubtful of Christ's ability and willingness to save, or waiting for some preparatory meetness to recommend us to him, God will have a controversy with us till all these pleas are given up, but no longer. When Christ is cordially received, as the only way of eternal life, there will be joy and peace in believing. Acts ii. 46.

2. God sometimes contends with his people for *some particular evil* which he sees in them; but in general it is only till we are brought to true repentance, and are willing to relinquish the evil. This appears to have been the case with David, and it may have been so with many others. Psal. xxxii. 6. The Lord contended with Job longer than with any of his servants, and his first affliction does not appear to have been for any particular sin; yet being continued, he did well to pray, 'Show me wherefore thou contendest with me.' At last, when he was 'made to possess the iniquities of his youth,' he repented in dust and ashes; and the Lord turned his captivity into joy and gladness. And though God contended long with David, in 'not suffering the sword to depart from his house,' yet there was much mercy mixed with his affliction, and all was over at death. 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

3. The *common troubles of life* are often shortened far beyond our expectations. There have been some trials of a bereaving nature, under which we have thought that all our comforts were at an end, and that such and such a loss could neither be sustained nor repaired. We have said with Hezekiah, 'I shall go softly all my days, in the bitterness of my soul;' and what good shall my life do unto me? Yet God has caused these sorrows to subside, and made up our losses by the accession of new comforts. There are also many troubles which we never expected to see removed, but which threatened to last to the end of life; yet the cloud has been dispersed, and a sweet sunshine has succeeded. Job said in his affliction, 'Mine eyes shall no more see good;' and Jacob, 'I shall go down with sorrow to the grave.' But the Lord did not contend for ever, neither was he always wroth. And if we love him and serve him, all our sorrows will be over at death, and we shall enter into the joy of our Lord. Psal. cxxvi. 5, 6.

How alleviating under all our troubles, that no temptation can befal us, but God is able to make a way for escape, that we may be able to bear it.

How preferable is the believer's portion: for in this life only he has his evil things; while for the wicked is reserved nothing but wrath and indignation, and God will contend with them for ever.

NEUTRALITY IN THE CAUSE OF CHRIST IMPOSSIBLE.

He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.—Matthew xii. 30.

Several things are implied in this language—

(1) That Christ is engaged in an important *contest*, and calls upon us to take a part with him. The cause which he has undertaken is the cause of truth, of righteousness, and of God, against the interests of falsehood, of sin, and Satan. The great majority of mankind are on the side of the latter; Christ calls on us to come off, and take sides with him.

(2) To be *with Christ* in this contest is to embrace the gospel, to obey its precepts, and openly to profess our adherence to the Saviour. And he that will be his disciple must take up his cross, deny himself and follow him.

(3) There is a description of characters who are *not with Christ*, and yet would not wish to be thought his enemies; and to these the words of the text principally refer. Who then are they? Not the openly profane, or avowed unbeliever; but the undecided and half-hearted, who appear to be between Christ and the world; who inhabit the confines of religion and irreligion, and are occasionally on one side and on the other. This state of indecision in religious matters, is here construed into direct and positive enmity: for "he that is not with me," saith Christ, "is against me."

I. Endeavour to point out a few of those characters which may be considered as undecided.

In general we may observe, that it is a character found chiefly under the means of grace; for those who reject the gospel are commonly open enemies. It is a matter therefore which closely concerns us. But more particularly, there are four or five descriptions of men who appear to come under the charge of being undecided, and who will therefore be reckoned with as the enemies of Christ.

1. The *sceptic*, or those who doubt of almost every thing relating to evangelical principles. It is true that some men err in being over positive and confident about their sentiments; but from an affected disgust with such forward professors, others also err, and seem to hesitate about every thing, even the most important of all truths. If a man doubts his need of Christ as a lost sinner, and the way of salvation by the blood of his cross, his heart must be wholly averse from the gospel, and he is an enemy to Christ. Thus were the Sadducees, who doubted of the resurrection; and of them it was said they erred, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. Matt. xxii. 29.

2. The *faint-hearted* is another description of undecided characters. The consciences of such are on the side of Christ, yet they dare not take any decided part with him, or in his cause, for fear of being frowned upon or derided by the world. Their temporal interest is at

stake, their dependance is upon certain individuals, and they are afraid to appear, or they cannot bear the scorn of fools. But what will Christ say to such? 'He that is ashamed of me and of my gospel, of him will I be ashamed before my Father and the holy angels.' 'He that loveth Father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me.' Hence 'the fearful' are ranked with the unbelieving and abominable, who have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. Rev. xxi. 8.

3. The *unfruitful*, who content themselves with merely the negative part of religion; who refrain from all gross evils, but are careful also to do no good in their generation. If they do not cause religion to be evil spoken of, do not oppress the poor, and keep themselves unspotted from the world, they do great things. But what does Christ say to such characters. 'Oh thou wicked and slothful servant!' 'Take ye the unprofitable servant, and cast him into outer darkness.' 'If it bear fruit, well: if not, cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground.' Matt. xxv. 26—30. Luke xiii. 7.

4. The *worldly-minded*, whose professions and expectations run high, but whose hearts are gone after their covetousness. There are no two things which men have oftener tried to unite, than the love of the world and the love of God. It is possible to keep up so much religion as will enable us to pass amongst men, and even good men, while the love of the world has full possession of the heart; and even so much as to impose upon and utterly to deceive ourselves. We have seen persons full of religious affections, who yet were under the dominion of covetousness, as well as other evil dispositions. The young ruler mentioned in the gospel, was under the influence of a worldly temper, and far from the kingdom of God: yet his own heart was deceived in it. But what says Christ? Ye cannot serve God and mammon: nothing but an entire devotedness to him can be accepted, with a single eye to his glory. Matt. vi. 23. 24.

5. The *outer court worshipper*, who though he may in some instances befriend the cause of Christ, contents himself nevertheless without any personal religion. Some of this description seem to value themselves upon their making no profession of serious piety, and at the same time despise those who do: yet even they would not wish to be thought enemies to Christ. Others because they do not pretend to serious religion, think themselves excused from it, as though christianity were a matter of mere discretion: yet such after all would not choose to be considered as Christ's enemies. Some who, by their amiable conduct in society, endear themselves to their religious friends about them; can yet live without prayer, and without God in the world. This is truly grievous, and in some cases distressing. Such characters seem as if they were too good to be classed with the wicked, and yet not good enough to be accounted righteous. What name then must they go by? Alas the text decides: He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

II. The equity and propriety of the construction put upon such indecision, or what grounds there are for its being accounted enmity.

Our Lord Jesus was not an uncandid judge, putting the worst construction upon things: he judged according to truth; there must be something therefore in this assumed neutrality that is peculiarly indicative of a depraved heart. There are some cases no doubt in which indecision may be very allowable, and perhaps commendable; but not in this case. Here it is totally inadmissible.

1. If it were a controversy so *abstruse and difficult* as to surpass the powers of our understanding, we might be excused in leaving it as we found it. But it does not require any superior power to discover that we have sinned, and that we ought to be deeply humbled on that account. It requires no supernatural faculties to justify God in the exercise of his righteous government; take blame to ourselves, and embrace that way of salvation which his wisdom and mercy have provided. As a proof of this, 'the wayfaring man though a fool shall not err.' Those who are blinded to these things are the wise and prudent of this world, the learned and polite. It must therefore be a proof of the heart being at enmity with God, not to be "with Christ" in such a cause, and on thy part, oh Son of David.

2. Where a person is *not obliged to take part* in a controversy, his neutrality must be excused; and there are many such controversies amongst men, and also amongst nations. But in the war in which Christ is engaged we are all deeply concerned, and must take one side or the other. Here, not to be for God, is to be against him.
If part of a country were to affect neutrality in any important contest which involved the interest of the whole, they would be deemed rebels: and hence the curse upon the inhabitants of Meroz. Judges v. 23. How much more in the cause of God, of righteousness, and of truth. Psal. xlv. 4.

3. If *the obligation* to the contending parties *was mutual*, we might be excused in remaining neuter. But what has Satan or the world done for us? They have promised much; but what have they performed? They have drawn us away from our best friend, and alienated us from our dearest interests. They have cheated and ruined our souls. What fruit had ye in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? We are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. Rom. vi. 21.

4. If the cause of each of the contending parties had been *alike sordid and selfish*, it might be proper to stand aloof from both. Or if the cause of Christ no more embraced the general good than that of Satan, we might have been well excused in a state of neutrality, and even commended for our virtue. But it is the cause of God in which our Saviour is concerned, and of the general good of the human race. Hence that awful sentence is denounced: 'If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ let him be anathema maranatha.' 1 Cor. xvi. 22.
If then such sort of indecision be constructive enmity, no wonder the Lord should speak as he does to the church of Laodicea. Rev. iii. 15, 16. Of what unspeakable importance is real religion, and to be truly decided for Christ!

THE BELIEVER'S EXEMPTION FROM DEATH.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.—John viii. 51.

The words of our Lord had a fulness of meaning, which unhumbled and inattentive hearers would overlook and pervert. This was the case in the present instance, as well as in many others. They understood him as speaking of the death of the body, which is common to all, and so pronounce the speaker mad. But he meant that death would not be death to them that believed in him; though it had the form, yet not the power; it would be like a shadow without the substance.

Two things require attention:—the blessing promised, and the character to whom it is restricted.

I. The blessing itself, an exemption from death.

It is necessary to observe here, *what death is in itself*, as the proper wages of sin. If we would know what a deadly serpent is, or fierce dragon, we must view it not as slain, but in all its strength and vigour. Death is called the king of terrors! but we could not form an idea of a terrible king, by seeing him when deprived of power and of life, but the contrary.

Now there are two ways in which we may see how dreadful death is in itself: the one is in the death of Christ as a sacrifice for us, and the other in the death of an unbeliever.

1. *The death of Christ* is a medium by which we may view the terror of this enemy. In being made a curse for us, death was that bitter cup from which his nature of necessity revolted, saying, 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.' Death also attacked him in his full strength. The wrath due to our sins was poured out upon him, as if he had been the greatest of all sinners; there was no mixture of mercy, but unmingled wrath and indignation. The manner too in which he died, upon the accursed tree, showed that he himself was made a curse, an outcast of heaven and earth. Such was the death of Christ! But he that believeth shall never taste of this bitter cup: the curse is extracted and death is no more death.

2. *The death of unbelievers* is also a medium by which we may view this dreadful enemy. Here indeed it appears in all its terror, especially if the following things be considered—

(1) It is attended in this case with *the loss of all things*. Their all being in this world, it is lost for ever. When they die, their portion is gone beyond recovery. Wealth, pleasure, fame, all are vanished: and though they carry sin with them, it is no longer their enjoyment, but their misery and their torment. There is in the death of a sinner the total loss of all good, and the total extinction of every hope: this is death! But not so the believer in Christ: he loses some things, but gains more; and for him to die is real gain. From hence he enters upon his inheritance, and death to him is no longer death.

(2) Unbelievers go down to the grave with *their guilt upon their heads*, and this is much more than merely suffering loss. They die in their sins, and this sinks them lower than the grave. The sting of death is sin, and this it is which gives it all its bitterness. Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Psal. xxxii. 1. But cursed is the man who dies impenitent and unforgiven. See the death of the old world by water, of Sodom by fire, of Belshazzar, whose knees smote together, only at the handwriting upon the wall; also of Judas, when he sought a refuge from his guilt. It is true every sinner does not die in such circumstances of horror; but all who die in unbelief must taste of death, and die accursed. This then is death in itself considered. But it is not thus to real believers; far from it. Christ has abolished death on their behalf; and hence it is not called death, but a sleep, a putting off the earthly tabernacle, a dissolving of the house, and going home. It is subject to Christ, who holds the keys in his hand, and admits his followers to the world of glory.

(3) As unbelievers die, so they must *rise and appear before God in judgment*. Death and judgment are inseparably connected. Heb. ix. 27. As the one leaves them, so the other finds them; and this it is which renders it terrible to an unbeliever. Death is the keeper of a prison, and at the great assize it will deliver up all its prisoners to the bar of God. This is death! Oh to die with a fearful looking for of judgment, and of fiery indignation! But death is not thus to real believers, on whose behalf Christ has disarmed the enemy of his strength and power. His presence at the last day will also divest judgment itself of its terrors, and they shall be waiting and looking for him who hath redeemed them from the wrath to come. 1 Thess. i. 10.

II. The character to which the blessing is restricted: "*If a man keep my saying*, he shall never see death."

"Keeping his saying," is a very expressive form of speech. It supposes that his word is regarded as an inestimable treasure; also that many would attempt to deprive them of it, but that they hold it faster than life, and would sooner part with any thing than his doctrines and commands.

1. This includes *a cordial reception of the truth.* Luke xi. 28. John xvii. 11. There are many "sayings" in the world, and many who are more ready to receive them, than the true sayings of God: and even to the rejection of the gospel itself. To receive Christ's saying, is to set our seal that it is true: but no one does this to any purpose till he sees himself a sinner ready to perish. Then his sayings are the words of eternal life, and the doctrine of the cross becomes the only door of hope. John vi. 53, 68.

2. It denotes *a persevering attachment* to the truth as it is in Jesus Many who receive the word with joy do not retain it, but in times of temptation they fall away. It is not so with real christians: they love the truth and hold it fast, in prison and in flames. In times of defection and apostasy, they keep Christ's saying, and will not let it go. Rev. iii. 8.

3. So far as it relates to the precepts of Christ, it denotes *a practical conformity* to his will. No other religion is genuine. There may be strong convictions where the truth is not received or retained: forgetful hearers, and not doers of the word. Jam. i. 23.

4. Christ's doctrine cordially embraced, is the best and only *antidote* against the fear of death. Living upon this we shall never die. John xi. 26.

THE DEGRADATION AND HONOUR OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL.

Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold. When the Almighty scattered kings in it, it was white as snow in Salmon.—Psalm lxviii. 13, 14.

The former part of this psalm is chiefly historical; it notices the principal events relating to the Israelites down to the times of David. The latter part is congratulatory, and refers to their future glory and prosperity.

Alluding to their degraded condition in Egypt, it describes them as having "lien among the pots," while employed in working the brick-kilns for Pharaoh, and seeking their repose under the hovels, or amidst the rubbish which surrounded them. In this servile condition they were considered as the refuse of all things, and the offscouring of the people.

By the special providence of God, they are now raised to a state of dignity and honour; 'their shoulder is removed from the burden, and their hands are delivered from the pots.' Psal. lxxxi. 6. For beauty also, and for purity, they are now "as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold." It is not improbable but doves of this description inhabited or visted the kilns of Egypt, and are here considered as emblematical of the flight of Israel, laden with the treasures of the Egyptians. For 'he brought them forth with silver and gold, and there was not one feeble person among their tribes.' Psal. cv. 37.

To denote the purity of the land which they now possessed, after the destruction of the Canaanitish kings, and their abominable idolatries, it is said to be "as white as snow in Salmon," referring probably to some neighbouring mountain frequently covered with hoar frost. All this was intended to remind them of their present advantages and obligations: it may also afford us some lessons of instruction.

I. We are here taught, that those who are exalted to the highest privileges and honours, ought not to forget their former meanness and wretchedness.

This lesson was suggested to Israel, by the recapitulation of their history, and is necessary in order to promote humility. They are here told of their poverty and wretchedness in Egypt, and were afterwards reminded of their abject condition when enslaved by the Philistines. 1 Sam. xiii. 20. Often in the day of prosperity were they reminded of their former adversity, to humble them, and to bring them near the Lord. Jer. 1, 2, 6, 7. Ezek. xvi.

If we also now enjoy the blessings of salvation, and taste the pleasures of true religion, it is good for us to remember our former vileness, guilt, and wretchedness. It is by having these things in remembrance that we realize our dependance upon God, and our obligations to his grace. Ephes. ii. 11—13. 1 Tim. i. 13—15. Hence also that humbling lesson is given us in Ezek. xvi. 60—63.

II. However low we may be debased in the eyes of the world, the blessing and favour of God are sufficient to wipe away all reproach, and to crown us with dignity and honour.

1. No *nation* is so low but God can raise it to a state of happiness and prosperity. Israel was once the fewest of all people, and was so insignificant as not to be reckoned among the nations; but they afterwards became the most renowned, and infinitely surpassed the empires of antiquity. Deut. vii. 7. 2 Sam. vii. 23. Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20. The history of our own country would show that we also have been in a low and degraded condition, lying like Israel "among the pots," though now distinguished by civil and religious privileges; and if at any time we are sunk low again, the same hand is able to raise us up.

2. No *family* is so reduced by misfortunes, but God is able to exalt them to riches and honour, and to turn all their mourning into gladness. In another generation it is possible that the descendants of many families now living in affluence, may be reduced to poverty and wretchedness, while others who are now low may rise above them. Such changes are often brought about by the wheel of providence. David was once Saul's servant, and was fed at his table: but afterwards, Mephibosheth, Saul's son was fed at David's table, and was glad to find in him a protector and a friend. Thus it is that even in providence 'there are last that shall be first, and first that shall be last.'

This reflection may teach us two things;—(1) The vanity of hoarding up riches, for we know not who shall gather them: a fool or a prodigal may give them all to the wind. Eccles. ii. 18, 19.—(2) The wisdom and propriety of showing pity and compassion to those who are poor and low in the world: we know not but our descendants may be as poor and as low as they, and stand in equal need of commiseration. The best way to secure wealth is to make a good use of it while we have it. Psal. cxii. 1—3, 9.

3. No *individual* is so low and worthless in a moral point of view but grace can lift him up. Those who have hitherto been all defiled with sin, like Israel among the pots, may yet be made holy. Those who have hirtherto been the farthest off from God, may yet be

brought nigh by the blood of Christ; those whose hearts have been most at enmity with God, may yet be reconciled; and those who have debased themselves even unto hell, may yet become an honour to the cause of God. The drunkard may become sober, the blasphemer may learn to fear an oath, and even the impure Corinthian may be washed and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Cor. vi. 11.

Say not then, oh sinner, there is no hope: I have loved idols, and after them will I go. Jer. ii. 25. Beware of sinking into despair, as well as of rising into arrogance and presumption: with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. Psal. cxxx. 7. Isai. lv. 7. Think what grace can do, if you truly desire it. God can overlook all your past folly, all your vileness; can cover you with the robe of righteousness, and adorn you with the garments of salvation. Isai. lxi. 10. Come then and buy of him gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed. Rev. iii. 18.

4. No *backslider* has so far departed from God but that, if he desire to return, grace can forgive him all. Yes, if thou wilt return, return unto me, saith the Lord. I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely. Jer. iv. 1. Hos. xiv. 4. Though ye have lien so long among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.

III. Purity is the beauty and the honour of any people: ver. 14.

The army of Israel defeated the Canaanitish kings, but it was "the Almighty that scattered them," and gave to Israel the victory. It was in his cause that they engaged, and that insured them success. Happy if the same or any thing like it could be said of later conquerors, who have covered the earth with blood; but who instead of seeking the glory of God, have sought nothing but the gratification of their own ambition; and the blood of many of their brethren of mankind crieth against them from the ground.

The scattering of these kings was the cleansing of the land from idols; and now that God had set up his tabernacle in the midst of it, "it was white as snow in Salmon." It is neither numbers, nor wealth, nor talents, that can confer honour upon a country, or upon a religious community, but God's dwelling in the midst of them. Moral excellence is the only true glory of man. God himself is glorious in holiness, and nothing but this can make his people glorious. Happy is that people, that is in such a case; yea, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord. Psal. cxliv. 15. Deut. xxxiii. 29.

This subject teaches us to look forward to the time when the whole world shall be what Canaan once was, 'the holy land;' when righteousness and truth shall dwell therein. 2 Pet. iii. 13. In order to this, God will again "scatter" the anti-christian forces, and kings of armies shall flee apace. Then shall the kingdom and dominion be gived to the saints of the most High, and all dominions shall serve and obey him. The world shall then resume its pristine beauty and purity; and after being stained with every enormity, it shall become "white as snow in Salmon." Dan. vii. 27.

MORAL INABILITY COMPATIBLE WITH GOSPEL EXHORTATIONS.

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. —Philippians ii. 12, 13.

It is a happy sign that our religious sentiments are correct, when we find a use for every part of Scripture, and perceive an agreement in the whole. Some things in this passage require to be explained; and if the explanation be just, it will not be inconsistent with other parts of Scripture, which declares unequivocally that our salvation is all of grace.

"Salvation" then consists of two parts; in a deliverance from the curse of the law, and from the dominion of sin. The first was effected by the death of Christ, without us. The latter is wrought by the Holy Spirit within us, changing the dispositions of the heart. The one is by price, the other by power. In the first we are wholly passive, in the latter we are active by being acted upon. Now it is of salvation in the *latter* sense that the text speaks, because it is that in which we are properly concerned. The Holy Spirit "worketh in us," but it is "to will and to do." It is we, and not the Holy Spirit that repent and believe the gospel; that mourn for sin and mortify the deeds of the body. The exhortation in the text therefore is very properly addressed to us.

To "work out" our salvation, is not meant of working in a way of merit or desert; for in this sense, salvation is not of works, but of grace. But it is to grow in grace, to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord, to work out our way through all the difficulties that lie before us, and to endure to the end that we may be saved. We must set our feet on all our spiritual enemies, and go on mortifying the deeds of the body that we may live.

This is to be done "with fear and trembling," a disposition of mind that must accompany all our striving to enter into the kingdom of God. The work itself is great and large, and the time allowed is short, very short for so important a concern as this. While pressing into the kingdom, we have reason to fear and tremble, lest we should not finally enter in and be saved. We are like persons on a dangerous voyage, and have cause to fear lest after all we should be shipwrecked.

It is God that worketh in us "to will and to do:" he gives us a heart to seek him, he keeps up every holy resolution till it is put into actual execution. It is of God that we are at *first* made willing to submit to mercy, and to be saved in his way, by coming to Christ for life. *Now* also it is of God, who makes us willing to give up all our idols, to watch and pray against every temptation, to run in the way of his commands, and to hold out in our christian course.

If it be asked *how* the Lord worketh in us? The answer is, not by forcing us against our will, but by making us willing, and that in a way suitable to our rational nature; namely by conviction, and by the influence of motives. Hence we are led to judge of things in a measure as

they are, and to act from the clearest conviction of the understanding. Only let the mind be in a proper state, and the eternal realities of religion will operate powerfully upon us, and give to the mind an impulse that is irresistible. Views of the evil nature, and awful consequences of sin will render us willing to attempt its mortification, and to submit to every species of self-denial. Proper views of the gift of God will make us thirst for that living water, and dispose us most cordially to embrace the Saviour. John iv. 10.

From the passage thus explained, we may infer,

(1) That *exhortations to holy duties do not imply any self-sufficiency in us,* without the influence of the Holy Spirit. They show us what ought to be, and so are proper both to saints and sinners. But something more is necessary to make us what we ought to be, and incline us to do what God requires of us. Exhortations place before us the motives to action, but it is the Holy Spirit that prepares the mind to recieve them, and to yield to their influence.

(2) *That the work of the Holy Spirit does not release us from obligation,* but on the contrary, affords an additional motive for our compliance with the will of God. There is as much need for us to strive to enter in at the straight gate, as if God had never promised the aid of his Holy Spirit. It is the same in natural things as it is in spiritual things; we are as much dependent in one case as in the other; and yet that dependence does not supersede the use of ordinary means. It is 'in God we live, and move and have our being;' yet we employ means for the preservation and continuance of life, and should have no reason to expect it in any other way.

More particularly—

I. Consider the exhortation itself: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

This of necessity implies that a great part of our salvation is still to come, and is not wrought out; that much needs still to be done in order to wean us from the present world, and meeten us for heaven.

1. There is much *remaining ignorance* in us, which needs to be removed. We have not yet learned to think of ourselves as we ought to think, nor of God and spiritual things as we ought. We know but in part, and see as through a glass darkly. We have made but little proficiency in divine knowledge; there are heights and depths which we have not explored.

2. Much *remaining depravity* in our hearts, many unmortified affections and lusts. There is in us a great deal of pride and vanity, love of the world, impatience and fretfulness under the dispensations of Providence, and a thousand evils which daily beset us. How important then that we watch, and pray, and strive; that we embrace every opportunity of serving the Lord, and do whatsoever our hands find to do with all our might. We are like the Israelites when they entered Canaan: we have innumerable difficulties to overcome, a host of enemies to subdue, before we can possess the land; and it is by little and little that we shall drive them out.

3. There are numerous *temptations and snares* that still await us: many as we have already escaped, there are still more in reserve. Satan will be working against us, the world will still be opposing us, and providences will still be trying. We shall need therefore great exertions, great grace, and great patience, to bear all, to overcome all, and endure to the end. Ephes. vi. 13.

II. The encouragement given us: "For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

1. Consider *the goodness of God* in "working in us." He might have left us to get through as well as we could, and given us up to our own vileness. If a nation were enslaved, and a prince sent a powerful army to their assistance, it would encourage them to renewed exertions to obtain their freedom. How much more the aid which God has promised in the spiritual warfare, which is sufficient to make us more than conquerors through him that loved us.

2. Consider *the power of God*, and of what importance it is to have such an efficient ally. When we consider the strength of our enemies, and the power of indwelling sin, we are sometimes ready to despair of obtaining the victory: but the consideration that God is on our side, and working in us as well as for us, is sufficient to animate us in the conflict, and to give us the assurance of ultimate success. Joshua xxiii. 10. Hag. ii. 4.

3. The *faithfulness of God* is also encouraging. He will not forsake the work of his own hands, but will perfect that which concerneth us, for his mercy endureth forever. Psal. cxxxviii. 8. If he excite spiritual desires, it is that they may be fulfilled; if he gives repentance, it is that it may be followed with pardon and eternal life. Psal. cxlv. 19.

4. The consideration that all is wrought in us *by the Holy Spirit*, suggests a motive to fear and trembling, as well as of humble confidence and hope. This should keep us from presumption, from running into evil, or letting down our watch. If God depart from us, or withdraw the influence of his grace, we shall perish like Samson in the midst of the Philistines. It is only by diligence and watchfulness, that we may expect God to work in us to will and to do of his good pleasure.

How lamentably deficient is that system of religion, which finds no place for the renewing influences of the Holy Ghost! It is like the earth on which neither rain nor dew descends, but is cursed with perpetual barrenness and desolation.

Let us be careful that we do not grieve the Holy Spirit by the indulgence of self-sufficiency, to the neglect of his inspiring and sanctifying grace; always remembering that he it is who worketh all our works in us. Isai. xxvi. 12.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.—Luke xxiv. 34.

To the disciples in their present bewildered state, this fact must have afforded unusual joy and satisfaction. They had been overwhelmed with doubts and apprehensions respecting the Messiah, and had just been expressing their feelings of the deepest despondency: 'We trusted it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.' Who can tell the painful anxiety which oppressed their hearts, during the interval between the crucifixion and the resurrection of their Lord, especially as they had formerly expressed themselves with so much confidence, saying, 'We know and are assured that thou art Christ, the Son of the living God.' It is no wonder, therefore, when the fact of the resurrection was fully ascertained, that the two disciples were so eager to return to Jerusalem with the tidings, while others of them had also the same joyful message to communicate.

Their hopes all depended upon this important event; the resurrection of Christ was the resurrection of his cause, which now for a few days had been so much beclouded; and they were begotten again to a lively hope. 1 Pet. i. 3. To us also the resurrection of Christ is no less interesting; the trust which believers have reposed in him is of infinite moment, and it becomes us to see that our hope is well founded. If our faith be vain, we are yet in our sins, and are of all men most miserable.

Let us therefore,

I. Examine the nature of the evidence, by which the fact of our Lord's resurrection is supported.

The friends and the enemies of the gospel are at issue upon this point, and all our hopes of eternal life are involved in it; it is therefore of the utmost consequence that the fact itself should be clear and satisfactory.

1. We may observe that the evidence of our Lord's resurrection is such as was intended for *the exercise of faith*, and not for the satisfaction of unbelievers, to whom it would prove a stumbling block rather than a means of conviction. The Jews require a different kind of evidence of his being the Son of God: let him come down from the cross, said they, and we will believe him. Other unbelievers have objected, Why did he not appear in Jerusalem after his resurrection? But in either case the great body of the Jewish nation would have had no occasion for the exercise of faith, and nothing on which to found the objections of unbelief. This however is not God's method of dealing with mankind: the gospel itself was delivered in the form of a testimony, and its principal facts are supported by the same kind of evidence, rather than by any direct appeal to the senses: and if they will not believe Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead. Our Lord has also told the Jews, on his last visit to the temple, that they should see him no more.

Matt. xxiii. 39. To have been seen of them generally, therefore, after his resurrection, would have falsified his own assurance. When Moses had taken a final leave of Pharaoh, for a rejection of all the evidence he had given of his mission, it would ill have comported with the dignity of his character to have returned and wrought more miracles for the conviction of the infidel king. Exod. x. 29. Equally unsuitable would it have been for our blessed Lord to have offered fresh evidence to a set of men who had rejected and were determined to reject all evidence in favour of his being the true Messiah; and on this principle Christ himself acted in more than one instance previous to his death and resurrection. Matt. xii. 29. xvi. 4. If evidence would have sufficed, they had seen Lazarus raised from the dead; but instead of believing, they only sought to take away his life. They had also heard the confession of Judas, that he had betrayed innocent blood; but their only reply was, See thou to that. Amidst such incorrigible blindness and hardness of heart, if they asked for a sign, it was but just that no sign should be given them, but that they should be left to multiply objections, and to fill up the measure of their iniquity. They were therefore left to stumble, and fall, and perish. Isai. viii. 14, 15. Acts xiii. 40, 41.

2. The evidence, though founded upon testimony, is amply *sufficient for faith to rest upon*, and therefore leaves all unbelievers without excuse—

(1) Because the resurrection of Christ was *foretold* in prophecy, and therefore an event that ought to have been expected. Isai. xxvi. 19. liii. 10. Psal. xvi. 9, 10. To the latter of these prophecies the apostle Peter appeals, in his address on the day of pentecost, Acts ii. 25—27; and Paul also in his reasoning with the Jews of Antioch. Acts xiii. 35—37. Our Lord himself repeatedly foretold his own resurrection, though the disciples had as often overlooked it. Matt. xx. 19. Luke xxiv. 6—8.

(2) The fact itself is attested by a *number* of competent witnesses. The Lord not only "appeared to Simon," immediately after his resurrection, but to all the apostles whom he had chosen; to whom he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. Acts. i. 3. He was first seen of Peter, then of the twelve; and after that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once. 1 Cor. xv. 5, 6.

(3) The testimony given of the fact is sufficiently *credible*. The disciples had never shown themselves very credulous; on the contrary, they were slow of heart to believe, and required no ordinary degree of evidence. Luke xxiv. 38—40. John xx. 25—28. They had no worldly ends to answer by their testimony; they knew that persecution, sufferings, and death would be the consequence. Their manner of relating the fact is such as to furnish sufficient proofs of its being true. The history of the two disciples going to Emmaus, as narrated in this chapter, carries its own evidence with it; and the sacred writer appears himself to have been deeply affected with the circumstances. Christ's appearance to Mary shows the fact in the strongest light possible. John xx.

(4) As the witnesses of the resurrection were not impostors, so neither were they *enthusiasts.* Their writings show this, for they are full of wisdom and knowledge, and make their appeal at once to the understanding and the heart. Besides it would have been impossible for them to have imagined all the discourses which our Lord addressed to them, and all the peculiar circumstances which occurred after his resurrection. Peter might therefore well say in the name of the rest, We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty. 2 Pet. i. 16.

II. Consider the connection which this fact has with the truth of the gospel, and some of its leading doctrines in particular.

1. The *truth of the gospel* itself rests upon the reality of Christ's resurrection; for if Christ be not raised, our faith is vain, and we are yet in our sins. 1 Cor. xv. 14—17. We have then no Mediator, no Intercessor, and our looking and waiting for the Son of God from heaven is altogether vain. We are yet where Adam left us, under the wrath of God, and without hope, for any thing that we know to the contrary. But if the Lord be risen indeed, then is the gospel true, and there is redemption through his blood.

2. The resurrection of Christ is represented as having an influence on our *regeneration*, or our being raised from a death in sin to a life of righteousness; so that none would have been quickened or born again of the Spirit, if Christ had not risen from the dead. Ephes. ii. 4—6. It is in virtue of his resurrection that the Holy Spirit is given, and that sinners are converted to God; all had else remained under the power and dominion of sin. John vii. 39. xvi. 7, 8.

3. It is essential to our *justification* with God. Christ was our representative, he bore our sins in his own body on the tree; was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification. Rom. iv. 25. But if not raised, our justification would be impossible, and we should still lie under the curse.

4. By his resurrection, Christ has obtained *dominion over death* and the grave, and holds in his hands the keys of the invisible world. Rev. i. 18. Death is no longer an object of dread to those who believe in him, for through his own death he hath destroyed him that had the power of it, and delivered those who were all their life-time subject to bondage. Heb. ii. 14, 15.

5. The resurrection of Christ is both the pattern and pledge of *our own resurrection*, and he is become the first fruits of them that slept. 1 Cor. xv. 20. Phil. iii. 21. 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

6. This important fact gives assurance of the general resurrection, and of the *final judgment.* Acts xvii. 31. All that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and must come forth, either to the resurrection of life, or to the resurrection of damnation. John v. 38, 29.

THE LIFE OF PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS.

Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.—1 Thessalonians i. 3.

Amongst all the primitive churches, that at Thessalonica was one of the most amiable, and they are always spoken of in the most affectionate and respectful manner. Paul could never think of them without pleasure, and in the text he addresses them in terms the most animating and encouraging. In a brief description of their character, he represents them to have been remarkably active and laborious, and persevering: and all this from a right principle, for it is ascribed to faith, love, and patience. On this account he "remembered" them in his prayers, and could mention them with joy, "in the sight of God and our Father."

The text may therefore be considered as descriptive of *the life of primitive christians*—

I. It was an active life, and this activity is ascribed to "faith."

It was "the work of faith." This is the principle that kept them alive, and stimulated them to duty.

1. Their religion did not consist in an *exclusion from the world*, or in retired contemplation, like some in after ages, or the monks of later times. Nor in selfish raptures, like some modern enthusiasts, who would make the whole of religion to consist in an assurance of their own salvation, and leave the wide world to perish in their sins. The life of primitive believers, on the contrary, consisted in doing good; in disseminating the knowledge of the gospel, in seeking the welfare of mankind, and in serving their generation according to the will of God. It was a life like that of our blessed Lord, who went about continually doing good.

2. Their activity is *ascribed to faith*, whose work it was. Faith is opposed to works, but not to working, especially not to working for God. Believers have always laboured in his cause, and for his glory and they are the only persons that have done so. This is also a very important principle: without it all our doings are of no account, for 'without faith it is impossible to please God.' It is eminently the work of God, to believe on him whom he hath sent, for this is the commencement of every good word and work. John vi. 29. Heb. xi. 6.

Where there is but little faith, there will be but little done for God. This may be seen in the case of the disciples, before and after the resurrection of Christ. When their faith was weak and wavering they did but little; but after the day of pentecost, when they were full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, they laboured with abundant success.

This may be accounted for, if we consider that faith brings us into a state of union and nearness to Christ, and enables us to lay

hold of his strength. Faith is likewise conversant with the promises, it is persuaded of them and embraces them, and this stimulates the soul to action.

II. The life of primitive believers was laborious, and this is ascribed to "love."

They not only performed the work of faith, but "the labour of love;" and labour is a stronger term than that of working. It denotes the taking of great pains and trouble in performing what is to be done, and counteracting and overcoming the difficulties that lie in the way of serving the Lord; and it is thus ordered, that our love to him may be fully tried. The greatest things that have ever been done, have generally been the result of extraordinary labour. This was exemplified in the great work of Moses, in bringing Israel out of Egypt; in the work of Nehemiah, in bringing them back again from Babylon; and of Paul, in preaching the gospel to the heathen world. The life also of our blessed Lord was a life of incessant labour, while with unwearied zeal and asiduity he preached the gospel of the kingdom, and healed all manner of sicknesses among the people.

The cause of Christ is like an immense harvest, where a great many hands are employed, a great deal is to be done, and all in a little time.

1. There are *multitudes of souls* all around us, that need to be converted, and the season is short. The world lieth in wickedness, and is in danger of perdition. Many opportunities and occasions of doing good present themselves, and there is a wide field for labour, both at home and abroad.

2. There are many *oppositions and difficulties* to be encountered, wherever a door is opened for doing good. The work of a christian is like rowing against wind and tide, every thing tends to impede his progress. He must go against the principles, the customs, and the prejudices of the world, and expect little else but opposition. What a view we have of the labours and sufferings of the christian life, not only in the primitive believers, but in the martyrs and confessors of all ages, in the early reformers, in the puritans and nonconformists of later times, in the privations and exertions of various missionaries on foreign stations, and in all that are in any degree eminent for God.

3. The exertions of primitive christians in this great and good cause are *ascribed to love*, and such must be the motive by which we are influenced, if we would serve the Lord Christ. Love is a flame that cannot be extinguished, a stream that bears us along, and carries every thing before it. 2 Cor. v. 14. It consists in that oneness of heart with God, with Christ, and with his people, that sweetens all our toils, that makes the yoke of Christ easy, and his burden light. Solomon is said to have rejoiced in all his labour, even in temporal things: but what was this when compared with the work of Paul, and his labour of love for Christ? He could say, I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. Acts xxi. 13.

The toil of a Pharisee is that of a slave; his heart is not in it, and therefore he thinks much of what he does: but love will make us think

little of all we do for Christ. The thoughts of God's love to us in the gift of his Son, and of the love of Christ in giving himself fo rus; will be a sufficient stimulus to exertion in his cause. If we love the souls of men, we shall labour to promote their salvation; and if we love those who love Christ, we shall lay out ourselves for them, and thus 'by love serve one another.'

III. The life of primitive christians was a life of patience, and this is ascribed to "hope."

Those who have been active for God, have often failed of patience in the day of adversity. But God must be glorified passively as well as actively, in suffering as well as doing his will.

Patience is exercised in three ways; in bearing affliction from the hand of God, in enduring injuries from men, and in waiting for suspended favours.

1. In bearing *afflictions* from the hands of God, Job was an illustrious example, though not a perfect one; and in him was exemplified "the patience of hope." He that does not love God in adversity, as well as in prosperity, makes good Satan's charge, 'that he does not serve God for nought.'

2. In bearing *injuries* from the hands of men, we have many bright examples in the sufferings of the martyrs, and in many others who have patiently endured the spoiling of their goods, the loss of character, and the privation of every earthly enjoyment.

3. In waiting for *suspended favours*, and the accomplishment of promises, there are numerous examples in those servants of God who have laboured long with very little success, and who still continue to labour in all "the patience of hope." Though faint, they are still pursuing. Those also who have been kept patient and resigned with heaven in view, though prevented like Israel from entering into Canaan, have exemplified the patience of hope; after having wrought the work of faith, and the labour of love. Christ himself was an example of each of these virtues: his life was a most eminent illustration of the work of faith, the labour of love, and the patience of hope.

This last is called "the patience of hope," because it is patience arising from the expectation of future good, though at present it is delayed. The hope of deliverance from trouble will enable men to endure great sufferings and hardships; how much more the hope of the gospel, the hope of success in our labours, of winning the prize, the crown of life, and enjoying the approbation of our Lord and Master.

All the work and labour of these primitive saints was done in truth and uprightness, "in the sight of God and our Father." This only is true religion, this only will bear the test.

PETER'S REPENTANCE.

And Peter remembered the words of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.—Matthew xxvi. 75.

There is an extreme difference between the backsliding of some persons, and that of others. Judas and Peter both sinned, and nearly at the same time. They were both apostles, and both sinned against Christ; one with his whole heart, but not so the other.

The fact of Peter's repentance is stated with great simplicity, but is full of instruction.

(1) Remark *the occasion* of it, "the crowing of a cock." Another evangelist says, that 'the Lord turned and looked upon Peter,' and this melted his heart: both no doubt contributed to the same effect. The unconscious bird awakened his lost mind to reflection, and the shrill pierced his soul. The eye of Jesus touched all the secret springs of sensibility; it was a look full of meaning, and Peter could understand it. It seemed to say, 'Not know me, Peter! And is this thy kindness to thy Lord!'

(2) *The effect* of this admonition, "he went out." Godly sorrow seeks retirement, it cannot bear the gaze of the multitude. While the heart is hardened and unconcerned, we may mingle with company, and even endure the society of the wicked; but when truly wounded for sin, we shall soon want to get alone, and there bewail ourselves like Ephraim. Jer. xxx. 18—20.

(3) He went out *and wept.* It was happy for him that he could weep. Judas also went out, but it was in despair, and he went and hanged himself. He was full of remorse, and full of misery, but there is no account of his weeping. He had no godly sorrow, no love to the Saviour whom he had betrayed; his was only the sorrow of the world, which worketh death. 2 Cor. vii. 10.

(4) It is observed that he wept *bitterly.* There was a poignancy in his grief which is quite unusual. His reflections were bitter, piercing him to the heart, and overwhelming him with sorrow and grief.

Our principal enquiry will now be directed to the source of Peter's repentance, or what it was that rendered his grief on this occasion so pungent and profused.

No doubt, all those circumstances which aggravated his guilt, now had their full effect upon his heart—

1. He would think of the *peculiar favours* which he had received from his Lord, and what an unworthy return he had made for them.

He was not only numbered with the twelve, but was one of the three disciples whom the King delighted to honour. Peter, James, and John were his intimate and bosom friends, and Peter was the first of the three. Jesus took him to the mount of transfiguration. Matt. xvii. 1. He was

with him at the raising of Jairus's daughter, and also in the garden of Gethsemane. Mark v. 37. Matt. xxvi. 37. Peter had been admitted to special intercourse, and was greatly beloved of his Lord: what then must have been his reflections.

2. The *strong professions* he had made of inviolable attachments, and the confidence he had in his own fidelity, must have added pungency to his own grief. He had said to Jesus, 'I am ready to go with thee to prison and to death: though all men forsake thee, yet will not I.' The rememberance of all this must have added a bitter ingredient to the cup of sorrow, and have overwhelmed him with shame and confusion, for such violated friendship and pledges of regard.

3. The *solemn warning* that had been given him, and which ought to have operated in a way of self-diffidence, watchfulness, and prayer, must now be remembered with the deepest regret. Luke xxii. 34. He ought to have been aware of his danger, after such a warning; yet it is probable that on the mind of Peter it produced a contrary effect. Instead of concealing himself, like the rest of the disciples, he would go to the palace of the high priest, to give proof of his fidelity: and there, unexpectedly, his courage failed him.

4. He had needlessly *exposed himself to temptation*, not only after he was warned, but without having an immediate duty to perform. He had no call to go to the palace of the high priest, his appearance could answer no valuable purpose; and if he thought that he might safely go as a stranger, and neither be called upon to own or to deny the Saviour, he was guilty of great presumption; the rememberance of which would cause him to weep bitterly.

5. The act of *denying Christ* would now deepen his grief still more. This act was made up of cowardice, the fear of man, and a mixture of falsehood. It was a sin of the greatest magnitude, and our Lord himself hath distinguished it as such by saying, Whosoever will deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. Matt. x. 33. It was therefore no sin of common infirmity, but one of the most aggravated kind.

6. The *dreadful oath* which accompanied this denial, is another circumstance which would deeply affect the heart of the penitent. He invoked the wrath and curse of God upon himself, if he knew the man! The bitterness which the rememberance of this would occasion, cannot be described. It was a sin without a parallel, sufficient of itself to sink him to the deepest perdition.

7. The *repetition* of the offence adds still more to the aggravation. Thrice did he deny the Lord; and though the intervals were short, a little time was given for the reflection. When first interrogated, and tempted to prevaricate; why did he not leave the palace, and get him out? If unable to suffer for Christ, or to endure shame for his sake, he should have fled: instead of which he stands it out with glaring falsehood, and accumulated guilt. Mark xiv. 70, 71.

8. The *situation of his blessed Lord* at the time would furnish another source of bitter reflection. Was it not enough that he was buffeted, spit upon, and smitten by the servants of the high priest? Must Peter also help to condemn and to crucify him? Could injured Good-

ness look upon such a faithless follower? Yet, amidst these indignities, Jesus turned himself and looked upon Peter; and when Peter thought thereon, he wept.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) While reflecting on Peter's conduct, are we in no degree chargeable ourselves with denying Christ? Have we not done it indirectly, through fear, or shame, or wordly interest?

(2) If so, have we gone out and wept bitterly, as Peter did? If not, the threatening lies against us, and it will be our ruin. Matt. x. 33.

(3) How great and unspeakable the mercy, that such sinners can be pardoned!

SUBMISSION TO BEREAVING PROVIDENCES.

The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.—Job i. 21.

The affliction and the patience of Job are set before us as an example, and there is scarcely any case that can occur, but something in his complicated trials will be found to correspond with it. His afflictions were sent, not so much in consequence of any particular sin, as for the trial of his faith. God is represented as glorying in him, and Satan answers by alleging that his religion was all founded in self-interest. The Lord therefore consents that trial should be made: the trial was made, and it turned to the honour of Job.

However painful any affliction may be, while we are exercised by it, yet when it is over we often perceive that all was wise and good; at least we see it so in others. In Job's trials in particular, God was glorified, Satan confounded, and the sufferer comes forth as gold.

That which supported him under all, was the power of religion, the value of which is never more known than in the day of adversity. This is the armour of God, which enables us to stand in the evil day; and having done all, to stand. That which enabled Job to take every thing well at the hand of God, was the love he bore to his holy name; and that name he blessed and adored, under all his bereavements.

There are two things in the text particularly worthy of notice:—The spirit of submission exemplified in the conduct of Job, and the principles on which that submission was founded.

I. The spirit of submission, under bereaving providences, exemplified in the conduct of Job.

There are several particulars in this case which serve to show the greatness and severity of Job's affliction, and the aboundings of the

grace of God towards him, which enabled him to endure it all with so much meekness and submission.

1. The *degree of his afflictions.* The objects taken away were more than were left, and seemed to leave him nothing to comfort him; his whole substance, his whole family, excepting one who only served to increase his distress. After this he is grievously afflicted in his own person: still he is submissive and resigned: chap. ii. 10. We may have had our losses, in property, in children, and in valuable friends; but we have not lost our all. We have also had personal affliction, but it has been mixed with mercy; not like Job's unattended with any alleviating circumstance.

2. His trouble came upon him *suddenly and unexpectedly*, and completely reversed his former circumstances. It was all in one day, and that a day of feasting too, when every thing appeared promising around him. Prosperity and adversity are like two opposite climates: men can live in almost any temperature, if but inured to it; but sudden reverses are insupportable. Hence it is we feel most for those who have seen better days when they fall into poverty and want. Yet we see that Job calmly submitted to all his trials and bereavements, and even blessed the name of the Lord. And shall not we copy his example? We have never experienced his trials, nor does God usually deal thus with any of his people; his strokes are more gradual, and less severe than in the present instance. We often witness the dying pains and sorrows of our friends, till they and we are made willing to part; thus the load is gradually diminished, so that we are able to bear it. But it was not so with Job, and therefore his submission is the more remarkable.

3. Though Job was eminently pious, it is doubtful whether *his children were so* in any degree, and this would render the bereavement far more severe. It is a great alleviation to our affliction, when those who are removed by death have given us reason to hope that they are now with God, and that they sleep in Jesus. But this consolation appears to have been denied to Job, who in the day of his calamity had manifested a godly jealousy over his children, which indicated his apprehension that all was not right, chap. i. 5: and how much this must have added to his affliction cannot be described. Yet we hear him say, The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord.

4. His submission also appears in a *holy moderation* which attended his griefs. A man of no religion would have been distracted, or have sunk in sullen despair. A heathen would have cursed his gods, and perhaps have committed suicide, being filled with rage and disappointment. But Job, fully sensible of his affliction, and feeling it in every point, still in patience possesses his soul. He rises from the earth, rends his mantle, shaves his head, and prostrates himself before the Lord.

5. Amidst all his sorrow and distress, he preserves a holy resolution *to think well of God*, and even blesses his holy name. Losses and trials are sent to prove us, and we have no more religion than we actually possess and manifest in the day of affliction. If half that reli-

gion so generally professed were submitted to this test, it would be found lamentably deficient; and this probably is the reason why some towering professors feel so little for their brethren in adversity.

II. The principles on which Job's submission was evidently founded.

There is something in the meek and humble resignation of a good man in the day of trouble, very different from that of other persons. Some sort of patience and submission is found amongst men in general, but not like that which real piety produces. There is the patience of despair, and a submission to fate; but Job's was of a very different description.

1. He considers *all that befel him as God's doing*, and this calms and quiets his spirit. He overlooks instruments and second causes, which would have given to his losses the character of injuries, and have filled him with indignation; and therefore he does not say the Chaldeans and Sabeans had done him this injustice, but "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." Seeing and confessing his hand, answered every objection: and however trying to the dispensation, it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good. This is true submission, to have no will of our own, but to have it lost and swallowed up in the will of God, even in those things that are most contrary to our natural inclination. 'I opened not my mouth,' said David, 'becauso thou didst it.'

2. He recollects that *all he had was from the hand of God;* that it was merely a gift, or rather lent for a time, to be employed for his glory. "The Lord gave," says the patient sufferer. These cattle, these children were not mine, though I called them so: in taking them away the Lord has only resumed his own, and left me as I was before, naked as from the dust I came.

3. He feels thankful that they were *once given him to enjoy*, though now they are taken from him. Supposing we are not allowed to enjoy our mercies for ever, or without interruption; were they not mercies while we did enjoy them? We may see reason to bless God that ever we had property, or children, or friends to enjoy, and that we possessed any of them so long as we did; though now, by the will of Providence, we are deprived of them all.

4. Even when bereaved of every earthly comfort, he considers God as *worthy of his gratitude and adoration.* Job could bless the hand that took away, as well as the hand that gave; and this must have been a special act of faith. We may not be able at present to see the mercy contained in any of our bereavements, yet in the end we may see it, as was the case with Jacob, when Joseph was sold into Egypt. But Job already sees enough to assure him, that all his afflictions should be overruled for good, and should promote his spiritual and eternal welfare.

REFLECTIONS.

(1) How wise then and how needful, to choose the better part which shall never be taken from us; to set our affections on things above,

where all is durable and lasting; and not on things on the earth, which are all fading from our sight, and quickly passing away.

(2) Afflictions, if not sanctified, will only tend to aggravate our guilt. They are the voice of God, calling us from earth and sense; the discipline which our heavenly Father employs, to make us partakers of his holiness; and if despised or disregarded, will leave us worse than we were before.

(3) The example of Job teaches us that a spirit of despondency and discontent in a time of trial, is utterly inconsistent with true religion; yet how many there are that faint in the day of adversity, and who, instead of deriving consolation and support from the promises of the gospel, are utterly inconsolable, and sink into gloom and despondency.

(4) While we admire the patience and submission of Job, we cannot but abhor the unfeeling conduct of his friends, who with only a small proportion of his piety could pass unwarrantable censures upon his character, and withhold from him those succours which humanity itself demanded. Job. vi. 14.

THE REWARDS OF BENEVOLENCE.

But my God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.—Philippians iv. 19.

Amongst men there is a great inequality of worldly circumstances, and it is wisely ordered that it should be so. In many things we derive mutual support from one another, and this unequal distribution of property furnishes both the occasion and the means of discharging the common duties of benevolence. Those who possess much temporal good are not to consider themselves as proprietors, but as stewards of the manifold grace of God; and such as are faithful to the trust reposed in them, will find it turn to a good account at last. Even in this world it is often seen, that what is done for others is not lost; and in the world to come it shall be remembered to their joy. This is intimated in the text. Paul was now a prisoner in Rome, and the Philippians had liberally contributed to his necessities. They are therefore told that they should lose nothing; but gain much by this exercise of christian kindness and compassion.

I. Briefly explain the import of the promise: "My God shall supply all your need."

It supposes that we are needy creatures, full of wants both for body and soul, for this world and that which is to come. Man if left to himself would in every sense be poor and wretched, miserable, blind and naked, and destitute of all things. We are therefore directed and encouraged to look to the Lord for all temporal supplies, as well as to deal with him for all spiritual blessings. Rev. iii. 18.

The promise in the text however requires to be understood with some restriction: for,

1. Though God engages to supply all our need, yet *he himself must judge what it is we do need.* We are too unwise and too selfish to know what is really good for us. Many of our wants are ideal, or artificial only: our real necessities are but few. We may think we need more influence, more wealth, and many other things: but the Lord has not promised these, nor does he allow us to covet any earthly portion. Jacob only asked for bread to eat and raiment to put on, and God gave him this and much more. Let it suffice us, if he withholds no good thing from them that walk uprightly: bread shall be given them, and their water shall be sure. In spiritual things also we are incompetent to judge what is needful. We may think we want consolation, when the Lord knows we need correction; and though in this respect, as well as in the other, he may not give us what we desire, yet he will give us what we need.

2. Though God will supply all our wants, yet he must judge of *the time and manner of doing it.* The Lord very often moves in a mysterious way to provide for our necessities, or to prevent our falling into poverty and distress; and his measures may appear to us distructive and ruinous. Who would have thought that Jacob's necessities, and those of his family, were to be provided for by the imagined death of Joseph, and by his being really banished for about twenty years from his beloved father? Yet so it was: and he was sent into Egypt before them, to save much people alive. Gen. l. 20.

3. Though God withholds from us some things which we think we need, *he bestows others far beyond all we could ask or think.* We often imagine, if we could but have our desire, it would be well for us: but if the Lord were to give according to that rule, we should soon be undone. It is our wisdom to pray as David did, 'Here am I: let him do unto me as seemeth him good.' God gives more in answer to such prayers, than to those who are more specific. And indeed, what is it that we can specify? We are ignorant of a great number of our wants, because they are constantly supplied, and so as constantly anticipated. If God were to stop the tide of mercies, both temporal and spiritual; how would it be with us then? There are thousands of evils from which we are preserved, and thousands of mercies we enjoy, of which we are scarcely sensible; and generally speaking, God supplies our need by not allowing us to feel it. The Lord also knows of many future ills and many future wants, which we cannot foresee, and against which we are therefore unable to provide. Our asking is like that of Joseph's brethren, and God's giving is like his, when he not only filled their sacks, but gave them provision also for their journey. Happy for us, our Father knoweth what we need before we ask him. Matt. vi. 8.

4. We have not only our common and ordinary need, which the Lord engages to supply, but also *our special times of need*, and for which he has made a special provision. Heb. iv. 18. Times of trial and temptation require extraordinary succour and support. When Paul had a messenger of Satan to buffet him, he obtained this promise, 'My

grace is sufficient for thee.' And to us the direction and promise is, Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me. Or if called to extraordinary labours, he will provide all that is requisite, and grant us extraordinary strength. Exod. iv. 10—12.

II. Endeavour to confirm the truth of the promise.

The language of the text is very strong, and it would seem as if Paul had the direction of the divine bounty. But though this could not be the case, he was authorized to assure the brethren at Philippi that they should lose nothing by all the kindness they had shown to him. God, so to speak, would not be beholden to them for the favours they had conferred upon his servant Paul.

1. Consider *God's infinite riches*, for he will give "according to his riches in glory," or his glorious riches. This indeed is not the case among men: the most wealthy are not always the most liberal, and but few give in proportion to their wealth. But it is here said that God will give "according" to his ability: and what then must his giving be! Nothing short of an infinite good. God has all things, and "all things are yours." The hearts of all are in his hand, and he can turn them as the rivers of water. If then he does not give much in this world, think not it is because he has not much to give, or that he is wanting in loving kindness and tender mercy; for his riches are immense and unbounded, and his love is infinite. If he withholds, it is because it would not be best to give, and because he would teach us our absolute dependence upon himself. He gives 'grace,' and he will also give 'glory;' and if he gives the best portion we may be content, though he gives not that which is inferior.

2. The *medium through which all our mercies flow*: it is "by Christ Jesus." God in all his bestowments has a special regard to Christ; and so dear is he in his sight, that there is nothing too good or too great to give for his sake. All his riches in glory are communicated through him, and in no other way. The Lord is so well pleased for his righteousness' sake, as to be willing to answer every petition that is offered in his name, and to do for us exceedingly beyond all that we can ask or think.

(1) What encouragement there is to do good, especially to those who are of the household of faith, and are suffering or labouring in the cause of Christ; for it is to such acts of kindness and liberality in particular, that the promise in the text is made. My God shall supply "your need," says the apostle, even as ye have had compassion upon me. So also he prays in another case, where he had found mercy in the day of trouble. 2 Tim. i. 16—18.

(2) There are certain cases which God has adopted as his own. He is the father of the fatherless, and the widow's judge in his holy habitation; and he will not suffer those who contribute to their relief to be losers by it, even in the present life. Psal. xxxvii. 25, 26. Prov. xix. 17. And in the last day, all these acts of kindness shall be abundantly repaid. Matt. xxv. 40.

PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM.

The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan, a high hill as the hill of Bashan. Why leap ye, ye high hills? This is the hill that God desireth to dwell in; yea, the Lord will dwell in it forever. The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.—Psalm lxviii. 15—17.

Probably these verses were sung at the time of carrying up the ark of God to mount Zion, to the tabernacle which David had prepared for it. While ascending the holy mount, the hill of Bashan would be in view, a very lofty and fertile mountain in Canaan. In poetic language Bashan looks down from its towering height upon Zion with contempt; nevertheless it was the hill where God would dwell, and where the ark should rest; and therefore it was far superior to the hill of Bashan. It was the seat of holy worship, and the dwelling place of the Most High. It also bacame the city of the great King, where stood his palace, the temple of Jerusalem, and where he fixed his imperial throne. Psal. xlviii.

Mount Zion of old was a figure of the church of God, which is his spiritual empire: and as nations usually strive for preeminence, so the heathen and idolatrous kingdoms which surrounded Israel, endeavoured to gain the ascendency over the hill of God. They boasted of their strength and numbers, of their retinue and splendour: but God the King of Israel has a far more numerous and splendid retinue than they: his "chariots are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels." Rabshakeh boasted of the kingdom of Assyria, that it had conquered all the surrounding countries, and would be the ruin of Israel. Isai. xxxvii. 10. After this, Babylon "leaped as a high hill," and looked down upon Israel with contempt. But Assyria and Babylon must fall, and all other kingdoms be destroyed; but Christ's kingdom must stand when they are broken in pieces, and shall become a great mountain, and fill the whole earth. Dan. ii. 35.

The figurative language of the text teaches us to consider,

1. The superior dignity and glory of the church of God, over all the kingdoms of this world.

Though we are not suffered to glory in men, nor in ourselves, yet we are required to glory in the Lord, and ought not to be unmindful of the distinguished honour which he has put upon his church and people. This may cheer us under all our discouragements, and support us when sinking into poverty and misery. It may be necessary however to remark,

1. That the honour and dignity of the church of God does *not consist in numbers,* though there have been a goodly company in all ages who have feared the Lord, and served him in truth and uprightness. Yet in comparison of the world which lieth in wickedness, they are but

a little flock; for strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Israel as a nation was the fewest of all people, a mere handful in comparison of the great empires of antiquity; yet they only were the people of God. The christian church at first consisted only of a small minority of the Jewish nation; it still includes only an inconsiderable portion of any nation where the gospel has been planted, and in all ages the Lord has reserved to himself only a small remnant. Rom. ix. 27. xi. 5. When he visited the gentiles, it was to take out of them a people for his name, and to build up the tabernacle of David which had fallen down. Acts xv. 14—16. Yet, though inconsiderable in point of numbers, the church of God possesses a glory far superior to the kingdoms of this world; and "the hill of God is as the hill of Bashan, a high hill as the hill of Bashan."

2. The true dignity of the church does *not consist in outward show*, or in worldly grandeur. Mount Zion was small and diminutive in comparison with the hill of Bashan, and pretended not to vie with its lofty height; its true glory was of another description. Neither does the kingdom of Christ exhibit any external grandeur, or present an imposing appearance like the kingdoms of this world. On the contrary its aspect is low and humble, not courting but shunning observation, and is overlooked and lost amidst the splendour and the glare of worldly kingdoms. On its first appearance it was not recognized by the rulers of the earth, but was reckoned among 'the things that are not;' it was owned and patronized by what the wise, the mighty, and the noble accounted to be the foolish, the weak, and the base things of the world. 1 Cor. i. 26—28. In every age its true history has borne the same character; and whenever kings and emperors, and earthly governors, have attempted to enrich and dignify the church of God with their honours and emoluments, they have reduced it to a worldly sanctuary, and despoiled it of its true glory. The kingdom of Christ, which is not of this world, but is a kingdom of righteousness and peace, and of joy in the Holy Ghost, possesses a glory that infinitely transcends all secular aggrandizement; and the hill of God is a high hill as the hill of Bashan.

3. The *presence of Christ* is that which constitutes the true glory of the church, as it is said of Mount Zion, "This is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the Lord will dwell in it forever." The inhabitation of a king makes his residence a royal palace, however mean it may appear in the eyes of the world; and it is this which constitutes the true glory of the church. It is what God hath chosen for his habitation, the place where his honour dwelleth. "The Lord is among them, as in Siniai, in the holy place." Christ's kingdom also ruleth over all, and shall survive all other kingdoms upon earth; of the increase of his government and peace there shall be on end. Isai. ix. 7. Dan. vii. 18, 27.

4. Another part of its glory consists in *the numerous and splendid retinue* with which the King of Zion is attended. "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels." Chariots were anciently used in war, and their number was reckoned the honour

and safety of a nation. Thus also when the king of Syria sent horses and chariots to take Elisha, and the prophet's servant was afraid, the Lord gave him a vision, and he beheld the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. Now the church on earth is guarded by these powerful allies, by myriads of holy angels, who are sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation. Heb. i. 14. When the Lord appeared on Sinai, at the giving of the law, the mountain was full of angels; and when Jesus appeared in our nature, a multitude of the heavenly host hailed his advent, accompanied his sojourn upon earth, watched his sepulchre, and carried him up into heaven. The communication between heaven and earth is still kept up, and the angels of God are continually ascending and descending upon the Son of man. John i. 51.

Hence we are led to observe,

II. That it is much more honourable to be devoted to the service of God, than to be exalted to the highest state of worldly glory.

Men who are employed in the superior stations of an earthly government, and near the person of the king, are thought to be highly honoured: but what is this when compared with the honour of serving God? 'Paul a servant of Christ,' is the highest title he could possibly have assumed. David never appeared so glorious as when he was engaged in the service of the sanctuary; nor Solomon, as when he appeared at the dedication of the temple.

True religion confers upon its subjects the honour of achieving the greatest victories, the victory over the world, and self, and sin; of defying the greatest dangers, and of diffusing the largest portion of happiness.

Why does the miser boast of his riches? The christian possesses a far superior portion. Why do great men glory in their power; that they reign as kings on the earth? The influence of christians is far more extensive; they have power with God and prevail, are made kings and priests, and shall reign for ever. Why do princes glory in their retinue? The meanest christian is better guarded, and more honourably attended than they.

"Why leap ye, ye high hills;" and wherefore do the wicked exalt themselves? They shall be utterly cast down, and the righteous shall have dominion over them in the morning.

Let us admire the infinite condescension of God in dwelling with man on the earth, for the "Lord is among his people, as in Sinai, in the holy place." He will also dwell with them for ever, and their sun shall no more go down.

PAUL'S PRAYER FOR HIS COUNTRYMEN.

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.—Romans x. 1.

Paul's conversion subjected him to the suspicion that he was an enemy to his country, a disaffected man, and of a most uncharitable judgment concerning his brethren, the Jews. This is no uncommon thing, though it is somewhat strange that a man cannot embrace the gospel, and begin to love Christ supremely, but he must immediately be suspected of the want of love towards mankind. Paul however repels the charge with the most solemn attestation, appealing to the Searcher of hearts for the sincerity of his motives, and for the ardent love he bore to his countrymen. Rom. ix. 1—3. In return for all their unkindness towards him, he longs and prays for their salvation; and in this he imitates the example of his blessed Lord, who desired the forgiveness of his murderers. It is christianity alone that can inspire such sentiments, and give such an example to the world.

I. Enquire what it was that made the apostle so desirous of the salvation of his countrymen.

1. He considered *the danger they were in of perishing*, and being lost for ever. Had there been no danger, and religion were only a matter of opinion, there would have been no need for such anxious solicitude. But a good man beholds multitudes all around him going on in darkness, he forsees the consequences that must follow, and is anxious if possible to avert them. Paul also knew the terrors of the Lord, he considered the import of the threatenings, was assured of their certainty, and that God was in real earnest, however poor thoughtless sinners might be disposed to trifle. When Aaron saw men dying of the plague in the Israelitish camp, he ran in with a censer before the Lord, and stood between the living and the dead. Paul in like manner interposed his labours and his prayers to save his impenitent countrymen from eternal ruin, and every real christian will do the same.

2. *The love of Christ* constrained him to seek the salvation of souls, and to labour for their welfare. He considered what Christ had done in giving himself for us; what humiliation, what sufferings, and what an ignominious death he had endured for our sakes; and the heart of this holy apostle was touched with the example, and stimulated to every exertion for the salvation of souls. 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

3. The *magnitude of salvation itself*, is sufficient to justify all the anxiety which the apostle manifested. Who can tell how great this salvation is, or what the soul is capable of suffering or enjoying in the eternal world? A period may arrive when the suffering of one soul shall be greater than that of the whole creation, from the beginning to the end of time; and who then can conceive of the unutterable import-

ance of an interest in the salvation of the gospel? Something of it may be seen in the price paid for our redemption, and in the bitter agonies of Christ in the garden and on the cross; but there is a depth in his sorrows which we cannot fathom, a dignity and a glory in his person which transcends our highest conceptions.

4. The apostle was influenced by a concern for *the glory of God*, which is inseparably connected with the salvation of sinners. There is joy in heaven over a sinner that repenteth, and joy on earth; and the father of the prodigal rejoices that his lost son is found. When a sinner is brought to submit to God's government, to bear his image and likeness, and is received into the bosom of his family, the riches of his grace are illustrated, and his glory revealed. The conversion and salvation of sinners are the reward of Christ's sufferings, the travail of his soul, which he was to see, to his joy and satisfaction. Paul therefore, and every other true believer, would long for the salvation of souls, that Christ might be glorified.

5. There were *some peculiar reasons* in the present case, that so powerfully awakened the apostle's sympathy, and which it will be proper briefly to notice—

(1) It is natural for a christian to feel especially for the souls of *his own countrymen*, who have a more immediate claim upon his regard: and this was the case with Paul. Persons who inhabit the same part of the world, or live in the same neighborhood, contract that sort of partialitiy which the love of country creates; and it is not the office of religion to destroy, but to improve and elevate those sympathies, by imparting to them its own benevolent qualities. Hence our Lord felt for Jerusalem more than for any other city; and Paul for "Israel," because they were his own people. Luke xix. 41, 42.

(2) Among his countrymen he had *numerous acquaintances*, whom he saw to be in danger of perishing through unbelief, and it was natural he should feel much on their account. When we look around and see many of those with whom we spent our early days, and formed our earliest intimacies, still strangers to the gospel, and walking according to the course of this world, we cannot but lament their unhappy condition, and long to see them brought home to God.

(3) We are led to feel more still for our *near relations and friends*, if any of them are left in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity. This can never fail to be the case, where religion has its proper influence on the heart. Our brethren, our parents, our children, must necessarily lie near our hearts, and the thoughts of an eternal separation is insupportable. Jeremiah was pained at his very heart, and his bowels were troubled within him, to think of the destruction of Jerusalem; but how much more, to think of the destruction of soul and body in hell. Moses could not endure to leave Hobab his father-in-law behind him in the wilderness; nor could David contemplate the destruction of his rebellious son, without being overwhelmed with grief. Neither could Paul view the state of many of 'his kinsmen according to the flesh, without having great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart.' Rom. ix. 1—3.

II. Briefly notice the means which the apostle employed for the conversion and salvation of his countrymen.

If we use no means, it is a proof, that our desire for the salvation of others is not sincere.

1. Paul laboured incessantly *in word and doctrine*, to bring them to the knowledge of the truth; and he did this amidst reproaches, necessities, and persecutions; encountering every difficulty and discouragement, that he might win them to Christ. Acts xx. 19—21. And though we may not be called to public services, we are required to bear witness to the truth, and meekly to instruct those who oppose themselves, in the hope that repentance may be given to them. 2 Tim. ii. 25. An admonition seasonably and prudently administered, has in many instances been attended with good effect.

2. A holy and *exemplary life*, adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things, is a blessed means of fixing the attention of others upon the reality and importance of religion; and Paul did not fail to exemplify the doctrine which he preached. 2 Cor. i. 12. 1 Thess. ii. 10. If we desire therefore the salvation of those around us, let them see our good works, and glorify our father who is in heaven. 1 Pet. iii. 1, 2.

3. Fervent and *importunate prayer*. Though we cannot command success, God can give it; and if we were more fervent in prayer, our labours would be more successful. Primitive christians abounded in this holy exercise, and Paul himself affords an illustrious example: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer for Israel is, that they might be saved."

EVIL AND DANGER OF COVETOUSNESS.

The love of money is the root of all evil.—1 Timothy vi. 10.

It is sometimes necessary to point out particular evils, to which certain individuals are more especially liable; but the sin mentioned in the text is almost universal, and is not confined to any particular description of character. Professors of religion as well as others are warned against this evil; for after having escaped the grosser corruptions of the world, they are in danger of falling into this species of mental depravity, which too frequently escapes the censure of the world and of the church.

I. Show wherein the evil itself consists.

1. It does not consist in the *possession* of wealth or property, but in the "love" of it. Persons may have much of this world, and yet not set their hearts upon it; and of this there are many illustrious examples. Abraham was immensely rich in flocks and herds, yet he walked by faith, and looked for a better country. David was rich in silver and gold, and was advanced to the highest station of worldly honour, yet his

affections were eminently set on things above. Others who possess only a small portion of worldly goods, or who have no property at all, may nevertheless make it the chief object of pursuit, and sacrifice every other interest to obtain it.

2. "The love of money" does not consist in setting *a value upon it*, or considering it as an object of desire, but in making it our chief good, or desiring it for its own sake. All temporal blessings have their use, and if not overvalued, are lawful to the possessor. The evil lies in making them an end, rather than the means of good; or if employed to some useful or valuable purpose, yet not in a way of serving the Lord, but in serving and gratifying ourselves. Or if we consider worldly goods as our own, and at our own disposal, not remembering that we are stewards who must give an account to the great Proprietor of all; then it is sinful, and we come under the condemnation in the text.

3. "The love of money" is generally indicated in the following manner—(1) In using unlawful or improper means in order to *obtain* it; such as fraud, deceit, over-reaching, or oppressing the poor and needy. Prov. xx. 14. To seek after worldly wealth to the neglect of our spiritual interests, and even to sacrifice our souls in order to obtain it, is one of the most common yet awful instances of human depravity. Luke xii. 20. Matt. xvi. 26.—(2) The love of money appears in a mean and selfish *detention* of it, when it is called for in a way of doing good, or re lieving the necessities of others. Such persons are always furnished with some excuse for withholding what is meet, even though it be no better than that of selfish Nabal. 1 Sam. xxv. 11.—(3) It appears in an *unwise temper* and disposition towards those who possess more worldly wealth than ourselves, envying their prosperity, and indulging in fretfulness and discontent. Much of this is often seen in persons of inferior stations in life, or who meet with disappointments which defeat the object their ambition.—(4) Being greatly *affected* either with the acquisition of or the loss of temporal good, betrays the same inordinate love of the present world. Lamentable instances of this kind have occurred but too frequently even in the christian world: persons who appeared zealous and devout, in moderate circumstances, have been lifted up with pride or have sunk into despondency, from an elevation or depression in their outward circumstances; while others who have flamed so high on the pinnacle of prosperity, have had their religion nearly extinguished in the damps of adversity. The loss of a fortune has ruined some men's religion as effectually as any other lust, though it may be they stood high in the christian world. The piety of Job however was of a very different description: Job. i. 21.

II. Observe the extensive and pernicious influence of this evil passion: it is "the root of all evil."

Not indeed that the whole of moral evil can be traced to this sin as its source and origin, but that there is scarcely any kind of wickedness which it does not prompt men to commit, in order to acquire property at one time or other.

1. The love of money has *extinguished every principle of justice*

and of common honesty. Whence originated the necessity of a criminal code, and the endless train of penal statutes, for the protection of property, and of right? The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient. 1 Tim. i. 9. Had there been no unjust or criminal attachment to wordly good, the moral law itself would not have been delivered as it is, in a prohibitory form, denouncing the various evils which disorganize the state of human society, and subvert the government of God. Whence come wars and fightings, where the regulations of war can have no effect? What is the history of the world but a history of crime? Who can calculate the mischiefs, the robberies, the murders that have been committed? What has the love of money done in former ages? What was Sennacherib, and Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander, and Cæsar, public plunderers; who for the gratification of an insatiable ambition were desirous of reducing the whole world to a state of wretchedness and misery. And what has this principle done in modern times, in every nation of Europe, in the East, and in the West, and in the South?

2. The love of money has *extinguished the common principle of humanity*, as well as of common honesty. What feuds and animosities has it produced in families, in neighbourhoods, and amongst individuals; what cruelty and oppression towards one another. What has the love of money done in Africa, where the most sacred obligations of humanity have been systematically violated for a long course of ages, and under the protection or connivance of christian governments? From whence also has arisen the oppression of the poor, in every form and shape which human ingenuity could devise; and from whence the envyings and jealousies too frequent among the poor themselves?

3. From the love of money *multitudes have sacrificed their souls*, and exposed themselves to eternal ruin. What induced Judas to betray his Master, or Demas to forsake Paul, but the love of the present world. What prevents men from attending to the salvation of their souls, but the cares and anxieties of life. They have no time for any thing else; their pecuniary concerns engage the whole of their attention. Matt. xvi. 26. In those who hear the word it is often rendered unfruitful from the same cause; and that which should be a savour of life unto life, becomes a savour of death unto death. Ezek. xxxiii. 31. Matt. xiii. 22

4. The love of money has done more than any other sin towards *the corruption of christianity*. This it is that has converted it into an engine of state, and rendered it subservient to mere worldly purposes, for power and advantage. The aggrandisement which the church at first received from Constantine, introduced the corruptions and abominations of popery, by furnishing motives to worldly and ambitious men to gratify the love of filthy lucre and of ecclesiastical dominations in the profession of religion. The emoluments which have since been added by other earthly rulers and governors have had a similar effect, and men have served the altar merely that they might serve themselves. Hence the forms of religion and even its doctrines have been corrupted and depraved, to suit the carnal taste, and to answer the purposes of

carnal and interested men. Wherever and to whatever degree the same principle has been suffered to have any influence upon the interests of religion, a departure from the purity and simplicity of the gospel has been the consequence. Christianity will not associate itself with worldly maxims, or with fleshly wisdom. 3 Cor. i. 12.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) We hence see the enormity of evil contained in the love of money, or the love of the present world. It is indeed the root of all evil; and how far its branches extend cannot be fully ascertained; but it is as the vine of Sodom, and its grapes are grapes of gall. Deut. xxxii. 32.

(2) Yet the love of money is a sin but little thought of, because it is not generally deemed disreputable, and because the want of opportunity frequently prevents the gratification of this passion. Men little think that the same principle which induces envy and covetousness, would in other situations lead them to desolate whole countries, to gratify the love of filthy lucre; and even to betray Christ and his cause for worldly gain. 2 Kings viii. 13. The evil however is not less, because men think lightly of it; for God has not only threatened to punish the exercise or indulgence of this principle, but the principle itself. The covetous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. 1 Cor. vi. 10. Ephes. v. 10.

(3) Whatever be our religion, if it does not conquer this lust, it will leave us short of salvation at last. The love of Christ and the love of the world cannot exist together, though innumerable attempts have been made to reconcile them. 1 John ii. 15.

ACCEPTABLENESS OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE.

Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice unto God for a sweet smelling savour.—Ephesians v. 2.

The most superficial reader could scarcely fail to notice two things in the epistolary writings of the New Testament; one is, that they abound with expressions of the unspeakable worth and preciousness of Christ; and the other, that all the doctrines are applied to practical purposes. Paul could never write without a constant reference to the Saviour; Christ and him crucified was the theme on which he delighted to dwell.

The epistle to the Ephesians partakes of the same character. Though highly enriched with christian doctrine, it closes with numerus exhortations to corresponding duties, some of which are enumerated in the text and context: chap. iv. 25.

The atonement of Christ is a subject of great importance, and deserves our serious attention. Let us therefore,

I. Take a brief view of the Scriptural account of sacrifices, as prefigurative of the sacrifice of Christ.

Nothing affords a much stronger evidence of the doctrine of atonement, than the history of sacrifices *immediately after the fall of man.* They appear to have been of divine appointment, from the manner in which the Lord testified his acceptance of Abel's offering, in contradistinction to that of Cain's; and also from the peculiar satisfaction expressed in reference to Noah's sacrifice. Gen. iv. 4. viii. 21.

From the early institution of sacrifices, the immediate descendants of Adam would learn at least two or three important truths—(1) The *necessity* of an atonement in order to the forgiveness of sins. Fire from heaven must fall upon the sinner, or upon the sacrifice offered on his behalf.—(2) The great design of God to *substitute* a sacrifice in the sinner's place. All this looked forward to Christ, the lamb thus 'slain from the foundation of the world.'—(3) From the Lord's 'smelling a sweet savour,' they would learn that he was *propitious* towards the sinner, and would accept him through the atonement, though he could be accepted in no other way.

Sacrifices were subsequently offered, *under the patriarchal age*, as appears in the history of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Very remarkable is the case of Abraham in offering up his son, when the Lord provided for himself 'a lamb for a burnt offering.' By this means the doctrine of substitution was clearly taught, and distinctly kept in view; and that in reference to the sacrifice to be offered up in the end of the world, the Lord would see and provide. John i. 29.

Under the Jewish dispensation a variety of offerings were presented, but in general they consisted of two kinds. The first were offered in *sacrifice*, in which the blood of the victim was shed as an atonement for sin. The next by way of *gift*, a free-will offering, expressive of gratitude for mercies received. The former of these prefigured the sacrifice of Christ, and our redemption through his blood. The latter were emblems of christian obedience, of devoting ourselves to God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable by Jesus Christ. Rom. xii. 1.

The text under consideration alludes to the former of these offerings, the sacrifice presented as an atonement for sin, of which we have a particular account in Lev. i. 2—9. According to the law of sacrifice here given, the following specialities must be observed—

(1) The worshipper is to *confess* his sin, laying his hand upon the head of the sacrifice, by which the sins of the penitent were in a figure transferred to the substitute.

(2) After this the animal is to be *killed*, and so to be treated as if it had been the actual transgressor, to show that the wages of sin is death.

(3) The blood of the victim being shed, is to be *sprinkled* round about the altar, in allusion to the 'blood of sprinkling,' to which believers are now said to be come.

(4) To show God's acceptance of the sacrifice, it was consumed by *celestial fire*, which continually burned upon the altar; and on some occasions fire from heaven immediately descended upon the sacrifice. Lev. ix. 24. Both were intended to denote God's acceptance of the offering, as a substitution for the penitent.

(5) The sacrifice was to be sprinkled with *salt*, and with other odours contained in the holy incense that was offered, that it might ascend as a sweet savour unto God. Thus he became propitious, and turned away his wrath, by accepting the sacrifice in the sinner's stead.

All this was a figure of Christ crucified, and the words of the text are a direct allusion to the Levitical sacrifices. Let us therefore,

II. Enquire what there was in the sacrifice of Christ that rendered it so peculiarly acceptable to God.

1. Its being voluntary, and entirely *the effect of love.* God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son. "Christ also hath loved us, and given himself for us." He was therefore of one mind with the Father. Great was the love that could induce him to lay down his life for us. He well knew what our redemption would cost him, and what was included in the bitter cup; yet he submitted to be made a curse for us, and bore our sins in his own body on the tree. All this was free unmerited love, and rendered his sacrifice peculiarly acceptable.

2. The regard he paid to *the glory of God*, and to the interests of righteousness and truth, was another ingredient which added to the grateful perfume of his sacrifice. The great principles on which the mediation of Christ was founded, were such as to be well-pleasing to God. In the whole of his obedience, even unto death, he manifested a supreme regard for the divine glory. By offering himself upon the cross he vindicated the character of God, and laid all the blame on man; and though he undertook to be the sinner's Advocate, it was not by palliating the offence, but by pleading his own sacrifice on man's behalf. Heb. i. 9. 1 John ii. 1.

3. The *dignity of his person* rendered his sacrifice of infinite worth; it would therefore be well-pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God, and of sweet-smelling savour. Christ's offering himself once for all, would answer the great end of all other sacrifices, so as to require no more sacrifice for sin. That which could not possibly be effected by the blood of bulls and of goats, is now effected by the shedding of his most precious blood, and he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Heb. x. 4, 17, 18.

III. Consider the evidences of divine acceptance, and of God's being well-pleased with the sacrifice of his Son.

1. One signal proof of this was given in his *raising him from the dead*, and not suffering him to see corruption. The Jews had crucified him as one worthy to die, but God raised him from the dead as a proof of his acceptance of him, and of his sacrifice. Thus he was justified in the Spirit, and the world should be convinced of his righteousness. John xvi. 8. 1 Tim. iii. 16.

2. By *exalting him at his own right hand.* The right hand is a seat of honour, and there the Redeemer is placed by the authority of the Father, until all his enemies be made his footstool. Psal. cx. 1. Heb. xii. 2.

3. In making him the *head of the whole creation.* This honour is conferred upon him as a reward of his sufferings, and to show that his sacrifice was of sweet-smelling savour. Phil. ii. 12. Heb. ii. 9. The whole creation also shall love and praise him for his humiliation and sufferings, and find in his unparalleled condescension a theme of everlasting wonder, joy, and praise. Rev. v. 12.

4. In giving him *the desire of his heart*, in the salvation of perishing sinners. Though this salvation originates in grace only, yet as to the medium of its accomplishment, it was to be the reward of Christ's sufferings and death. Isai. liii. 11. And being now exalted at God's right hand, the desire of his heart shall be granted him. Psal. ii. 8. xx. 1—4.

5. God has testified his acceptance of Christ's sacrifice by bestowing upon us *all spiritual blessings for his sake.* Whatsoever we ask in his name, it shall be given us; yea, and blessings which were never asked, are freely given us for his sake. Such are all those blessings included in renewing and regenerating grace, when we are first brought to repent and believe the gospel. God is so well pleased with him, as to be well pleased with us and our services, when done from love to him and a regard for his glory.

(1) If Christ is chosen of God and precious, let us enquire whether he be so to us also; for on this depends the evidence of our religion. 1 Pet. ii. 7. Are we well pleased for his righteousness' sake; and do we so esteem his sacrifice as to place all our reliance upon it for acceptance with God?

(2) How awful the state of those who reject his atonement, or who trifle with his blood. There remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation. Heb. x. 26, 27.

UNIVERSAL CORRUPTION OF MANKIND.

God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Every one of them is gone back, they are altogether become filthy, there is none that doeth good, no not one.—Psalm liii. 2, 3.

This is not merely a description of the state of mankind in David's time, but a description of human nature at all times, and is applied by an apostle to the state of the world many hundreds of years after the words were written. Rom. iii. 10—12.

I. Seeking the Lord is here supposed to be the criterion of a good understanding.

That it is so, will easily be made apparent; and these two things are with great propriety connected together. It is only 'the fool that saith in his heart, there is no God;' a true understanding sees it to be well for the universe that there is a God, and that it would be every one's interest to seek and obey him. Psal. xcvii. 1.

1. Seeking the Lord includes our *choosing the best good for our portion*, and supposes that we are seeking a happiness superior to what this world can afford. This is what the truest wisdom would dictate: but this blessedness is only to be found in God, whose lovingkindness is better than life. Communion and intercourse with him is the sum of all enjoyment; his service is its own reward, and those who have truly entered into it would never wish to go out free. Psal. xix. 10, 11. xxvii. 4.

2. Seeking the Lord includes *repentance for sin;* and this is what a good understanding would lead to, for it is altogether consonant with right reason. Job v. 8. If nothing but our own interest were consulted, it would lead to this; and hence it is said of the prodigal when he repented, that he came to himself, and he that had been lost was found. Luke xv. 17.

3. It includes the sacrifice of every earthly good *for his sake*, and accounting his favour to be better than life. This is what a good understanding would approve, it being its proper province to form a just estimate of things. Who then acted the wiser part, Esau who sold his birthright, or Jabez who desired it that he might be blessed indeed? Who gave the best proof of a good understanding, Cain in leaving his native country because God was there; or Moses in forsaking Egypt because the Lord was not there? Was the rich man in the gospel wise, in setting his heart upon the good things of this life; or David, who desired not to have his portion with the men of this world. Psal. xvii. 5.

4. Seeking the Lord includes the resting all our hopes of salvation *upon the promises of his word;* and this is what a right understanding would approve. Hence he is called a wise man who built his house upon a rock; and he whose hope is in the promises of God, to the exclusion of every other ground of confidence, is equally wise and safe. There is no other door of hope, no other way of acceptance, but what is provided in the promises of the gospel.

II. All men by nature are corrupt, and utterly destitute of this understanding. "There is none that doeth good, no not one."

1. The loss of the divine favour is *the greatest of all evils*, and yet no one lays it to heart, or is careful to seek after it. It might have been expected that men would have seen their folly in forsaking him, the fountain of living waters; would have had their eyes open to behold the tempter, who at first seduced them from God, and be anxious to return unto him from whom they have deeply revolted. Instead of this, there is none that understandeth, none that seeketh after God.
It is also the greatest of all evils that God has departed from us, and that he hides his face in anger. His favour is lost and gone; we are now without hope, without God in the world, and have no friend in time of

need. We and all that we possess, are under the curse. To be contented in such a state, and indifferent about the favour of God, is truly dreadful: yet such is the case with all men by nature.

2. God visits men with *such afflictions*, and brings them into such circumstances, as are directly adapted to make them feel their need of him: and yet God is not in all their thoughts. Job xxxiii. 15. Men either imagine that God does not see the evils with which they are visited, or that it is better to seek relief from any other quarter; like Ahaziah, who sent to the God of Ekron in a time of sickness, as if there were no God in Israel. 2 Kings i. 2, 3. It might be expected that sickness and death would lead men to seek after God; but no, there is none that understandeth, and the workers of iniquity have no knowledge.

3. By nature we have *no love to God*, and therefore do not seek him. The object of our affection is necessarily an object of desire; nothing but enmity, or the most perfect indifference, can render us unmindful of the friendship of God. And what an insult is offered to the Majesty of heaven, that we have lost his favour, and are indifferent about it.

4. Men are full of *pride and self-sufficiency*, and hence they do not seek after God. Psal. x. 4. Religion is too mean for their notice, and fit only for the attention of the vulgar. Many say in their hearts with Pharaoh, who is the Lord that I should obey his voice? Great things are promised to them that seek the Lord; they shall be sure to find him, and obtain the remission of their sins; yet these promises are disregarded, and God is utterly forgotten.

III. The Lord keeps a strict eye upon the conduct of men towards him: "He looked down from heaven to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God."

But though 'every one of them is gone back, and they are altogether become filthy;' yet some are distinguished by grace, and there is a generation of them that seek thy face, oh God of Jacob. Psal. xxiv. 6. His eye is upon all such, and he will be found of them in truth; they shall never seek his face in vain. Isai. xlv. 9. He heard Ephraim when he was mourning alone, and solitary; and Jonah when he cried unto him out of the belly of hell. Jer. xxxi. 18. Those who repent and return to God, shall find him like the father of the prodigal, ready to forgive.

The Lord also notices those who do not seek him, and his eye is upon all their ways. He sees the wicked preferences of the heart, all their pride and contempt of him. Awful thought, to be under his inspection while utterly regardless of his presence, and sinning against heaven and before him.

How great is the loving kindness of God in promising salvation to them that seek him; and how inexcusable to neglect and forsake so much mercy. What bitterness will it add to the reflection, that all is lost through our own wilful neglect; and that God is for ever far from us, because we desired not the knowledge of his ways. Prov. i. 28—31.

NATURE OF REGENERATION.

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.—John iii. 3.

In the conduct of Nicodemus, to whom these words were addressed, there are several things worthy of notice—

(1) He had a *general conviction* of the truth of christianity, though ignorant of some of its leading principles. He knew that Christ was sent of God, and yet could not understand the doctrine of the new birth. This is a very common case: there are many who know that the gospel is true, who are yet unacquainted with its sanctifying and renovating influence.

(2) Nicodemus being a great man, a ruler of the Jews, was in part ashamed to *own the truth*, and to be seen amongst its decided friends. He did not like to appear in the daytime, and therefore 'came to Jesus by night;' but it would have been to his honour openly to have owned the cause of Christ.

(3) He came to Jesus for *instruction*, but our Lord intimates that instruction was not all he needed; he must be "born again," and could not receive instruction to any saving purpose without it. Herein lies the fitness and propriety of our Lord's answer. The plainest truths are full of darkness to an unrenewed mind, because they can only be spiritually discerned. 1 Cor. ii. 14. Nicodemus however was at length brought to receive the truth in love, and he became a disciple of the Lord Jesus. John xix. 39.

I. Endeavour to explain the nature of the change mentioned in the text, or what it is to be "born again."

The expression is figurative, but denotes a real and important change. It is sometimes called a being 'created anew' in Christ Jesus; being 'quickened' from a death in sin; giving a 'new heart,' and putting a 'right spirit' within us; being called out of 'darkness,' into his marvellous 'light;' putting off the 'old man,' and putting on the 'new man,' and becoming 'new creatures' in Christ Jesus. By these, and a variety of similar expressions, this great moral change is denoted.

(1) From all these we may see, that it means something more than a bare *reformation of conduct*. Such language as that in the text would not have been employed to express a mere outward change, for that may take place without any renovation of the heart. Besides, Nicodemus need not have 'marvelled,' if this had been all; for every one would admit that some sort of morality attaches to the profession of religion. Nor does it appear that Nicodemus himself needed such a change as this. He was a 'pharisee,' and therefore had to boast of his own righteousness; and like Paul, as touching the law he was blameless. Neither was it needful for the Holy Spirit to produce such a change as this, for it might exist without his special in-

fluence, and has existed where that influence is denied. The change insisted on by our Lord is effected by the agency of the Holy Spirit: it is therefore an internal change wrought upon the soul, a being "born of water, and of the Spirit."

(2) Nor does it consist merely in having *the understanding enlightened*, for Nicodemus was possessed of some religious light, and yet he must be "born again." There may be a great deal of light in the head, and yet the heart remain the same. Many are enlightened in hearing the word, and yet are far enough from being new creatures in Christ Jesus. They are still estranged from the life of God, and from the power of religion, notwithstanding their superior means of information. Wherein then does this change consist, and what is it to be born again?

(3) To be born of the Spirit consists in *a change of heart* respecting God, and the things of God. It is a change in the disposition and temper of the mind, or the turning of the heart to God; a change in the judgment and affections, effected by the agency of the Holy Spirit. It is that change which produces repentance and faith, and from which every holy exercise of the mind proceeds, as streams from the fountain, and as branches from the root.

More particularly—

1. To be born again is to have *the image of God restored in the soul*, and to be created anew in righteousness and true holiness. As in our natural birth we are made to bear the image of the earthly, so in this the image of the heavenly. Man was once in the image of his Maker; he was made upright, in the likeness of God created he him: but that image was defaced by sin, and totally lost by the fall. Man in his original state was what he ought to be; his understanding was all light, without any darkness at all; his will was all rectitude, without any deviation from the standard of truth; his affections all purity, without the least defilement, and his heart was wholly on the side of God. But now all is lost and gone, and we are by nature children of wrath. Regeneration is the re-impression of this image upon us, bearing a resemblance to the moral perfections of God, and being changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2. Regeneration is *the commencement of a new life in the soul*, the beginning of a new state of things. It is to become new creatures; old things are passed away, and behold all things become new, and we enter as it were into a new world.

(1) It is accompanied with a new set of *thoughts and sentiments*, so that no one object of a moral kind now appears in the same light as before. All the views and prospects of the mind are changed, and we begin to know things after a different manner. We begin to have new thoughts of ourselves as sinners, and of Christ as the Saviour; new thoughts of God and his righteous government, of the law and of the gospel, of this world and that which is to come. Or if our thoughts be not materially altered on these subjects generally, we are very differently affected with them, and feel a new interest in them, unknown to ourselves before.

(2) It is accompanied with a new set of *affections and attachments.* We had hopes and fears, joys and griefs, pleasure and pain before; but now they are derived from a different source. We have now very different objects of desire and of dread, and sources of pleasure totally unknown before. It is all a new state, and a new world. The Lord hath led us by a way that we knew not, and in paths that we have not known. Isai. xlii. 16.

(3) There is now a new set of *principles and motives.* If we attend to the same religious duties as formerly, yet it is in a very different manner. The same things which before were burdensome, are now delightful; and what was formerly done from a spirit of self-righteousness, is now done to the glory of God. Fear used to be the impelling motive, now it is love. Before, it was the hope of being delivered from misery; now it is delight in the thing itself, and the service of God is desired for its own sake.

(4) There is also a new set of *companions and associates.* We had our friends and attachments, and so we have now; but they are of a different description. We are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. The righteous are now the excellent of the earth, in whom is all our delight.

These are some of the leading features of the change intended in the text. Let us now attempt,

II. An improvement of the subject.

1. Let us *examine ourselves*, and what we know of this change in our own souls. Are we conscious that some such change has passed upon us? Some indeed may look back to the time when they were enemies to God at heart, and others to the time when they were in a state of indifference and unconcern: but in all real believers there is a change like that which we have briefly explained, though it may be more or less evident to those who are the subjects of it.

2. We learn from hence, what is *essential to true religion*, and to its very existence in the soul. It is in vain to think ourselves christians, unless we are born again. We know nothing as we ought to know without this, and our profession is a mere delusion.

3. We see to whom we are *indebted* for this great moral change, even to the Spirit of the living God, who quickeneth whom he will. Who made thee to differ; and what hast thou, that thou hast not received? All our salvation is of God, from the foundation to the topstone thereof Grace, grace unto it.

NECESSITY OF REGENERATION.

Verily, Verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.—John iii. 3.

Having explained the nature of the change intended; that it does not consist in a mere reformation of conduct, or in the understanding being merely enlightened, but in an inward change of heart, in which we are made to bear the moral image of God, and are created anew in Christ Jesus; that it is the commencement of a new life, accompanied with new sentiments and affections, new principles and motives of conduct, and that this change is the immediate product of the Holy Spirit;—our business now will be to consider,

The necessity of this change, or why we must be born again, in order to our seeing the kingdom of God.

This necessity applies, not only to some, but to all without exception, irrespective of our former state or character, for there is no respect of persons with God.

Here it will be proper to consider a few things which render this change of heart necessary.

The solemn asseveration of our Lord, ought indeed of itself to be sufficient to convince us of its absolute necessity. As a teacher come from God, his doctrine must be true, and the peculiarly solemn manner in which he speaks on this occasion, is deserving of special regard. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Other considerations however may be added, to show the necessity of this change: some of which are the following—

1. The *depravity of human nature* affords abundant evidence, that except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. We should not need to be regenerated, if we had not first become degenerate; if not wholly ruined by sin, we should not need to be created anew and born again. The state of human nature is like the house infected with the leprosy; repairing will not do it, it must be re-constructed. That which is born of the flesh is flesh: if we had any good thing in us, we need not be created anew to good works. If not dead in trespasses and sins, and beyond the hope of recovery, we need not be quickened according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead. But such is our state by nature, that we are wholly corrupt; there is none that doeth good, no not one; the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; all the imaginations of the thoughts of the heart are evil, only evil, and that continually; the carnal mind is enmity against God, not being subject to his law, neither indeed can be. Such is our moral condition, and while it continues so, we cannot see the kingdom of God.

2. The *nature of the heavenly world* renders this change necessary. Flesh and blood in its present state, cannot inherit the kingdom of God. There must be a meetness, before we can be made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, and such a meetness as corresponds with the nature of that inheritance: all true enjoyment arises from congeniality, or an agreement in the disposition with the object to be enjoyed.

(1) In order therefore to "see" the kingdom of God, there must be a *spiritual discernment.* All the objects of that kingdom are spiritual and holy, and cannot be known but by a spiritual and holy mind. The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 1 Cor. ii. 14. Man is wholly blind to the equity of the law, and to the grace of the gospel; he sees no glory in the Lawgiver, and none in the Saviour. The eyes of his understanding must be enlightened, by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, or he can have no perception of the moral beauty and excellency of heavenly things. Ephes. i. 17, 18. Matt. xvi. 17.

(2) To see the kingdom of God, we must have *a spiritual taste*, a holy relish for divine things, otherwise heaven could not be a place of enjoyment to us. The glory and happiness of the future state will eminently consist in a delightful and profound contemplation of God's perfections, in intimate nearness to him, and in having fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness; and what communion hath light with darkness? 2 Cor. vi. 14. There is no entering into the kingdom, no enjoyment of its bliss, without an ardent relish for spiritual and holy things. 1 John. i. 7.

(3) The heavenly state requires a *disposition for holy activity*, a heart to love and serve the Lord. Though the redeemed shall cease from their present labours and sufferings, they shall not be unemployed, but shall serve God day and night in his temple. Heaven will be a place of unbounded activity: he maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. There his servants shall serve him, with unwearied zeal and assiduity. But how totally unfit for all this is man in his unregenerate state, having no heart for God, or for holy exercises; and to whom a Sabbath on earth is wearisome! Either heaven must cease to be what it is, or the sinner's heart must be renewed.

(4) There requires a thirsting and a *longing after holiness*, not only to be free from sin, but to desire it as the perfection of bliss, the very essence of salvation. But the holiness of that world would utterly confound the sinner. Isaiah, when he had only a vision of the Holy One, cried out, I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips! And when Peter had a display of the purity and glory of the Saviour, he exclaimed, Depart from me, oh Lord, for I am a sinful man. What then would the sinner do? He might have some relish for a Mahometan paradise; but how could he endure the effulgence of bliss and purity which surrounds the throne of God?

In addition to the nature of the heavenly state, as rendering regeneration necessary, we might observe,

3. The *immutability of God* shows that such a change is indispensa-

ble. A change there must be somewhere, since so solemn an asseveration has been given; and if it cannot be in him, it must take place in us. If it were possible that the nature of things might alter, or that God should cease to hate evil and love holiness, a sinner might be saved without any change of heart: otherwise it is absolutely and for ever impossible. The irrevocable sentence of God is, 'there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, or that worketh abomination:' but man is all uncleanness, and therefore cannot enter. If on earth two cannot walk together except they are agreed; it is impossible that a holy God and a polluted creature should dwell together in heaven.

How utterly vain then is every hope of salvation without regenerating grace; and how needful to enquire into our own state individually, and how we stand in the sight of God.

The reality of this change must be judged of by its effects, and their accordance with the holy Scriptures. 1 Peter ii. 1—3.

THE SERVICE OF GOD ITS OWN REWARD.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.—1 Corinthians xv. 58.

Many of the Corinthians who appeared to embrace the gospel, were afterwards disposed to relinquish some of its leading principles, on the ground of their being too mysterious for belief, and they could not admit what they were unable to comprehend. Too much of the same spirit prevails in the present day; it is now too common to hold the doctrines of christianity with a loose hand, and to represent religious sentiments as of little consequence. The Scriptures on the contrary suppose, that there is a close connection between principle and practice; and Paul, after having fully established the doctrine of the resurrection and a future state, immediately derives from it the practical inference stated in the text; or, that the doctrine in question affords a most powerful motive to diligence and perseverance in the work of the Lord.

I. Explain the exhortation: "always abounding in the work of the Lord."

"The work of the Lord" is that holy and sacred employment in which all his servants are engaged, and which is intended to promote his kingdom and glory in the world. It is true, all are not engaged in the same department; some plant, and others water; some break up the fallow ground, and others cast in the precious seed; some labour at home, and others abroad. In the church of God there is a variety of gifts to profit withal; some preach, and others hear; some employ their

influence, some their property, and others their talents. But all are serving the same Master, and seeking to promote the same great design. Whatever contributes to the cause of truth and righteousness, that is the work of the Lord; and is to be the business of our lives, in whatever station we are placed.

But it is not sufficient merely to engage in the Lord's service; we are required to "abound" in it, and "always" to abound. Those who preach the word are commanded to be instant in season and out of season, to rebuke and exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. Those who hear are to take heed how and what they hear, and to give the more earnest heed, lest at any time they should let it slip. Those who pray are to pray always, without ceasing, with all prayer and supplication. Those who have influence, property, or talents of any kind, are to employ them as good stewards of the manifold grace of God: and whatsoever our hands find to do, we are to do it with all our might. Rom. xii. 6—11.

More particularly—

1. To be always abounding in the work of the Lord, let us beware of resting contented with *present attainments.* If we have set out in the ways of God, let it be our great concern to be going forward, and to hold out to the end. Let us not only begin well, but go on till God shall say at last, Well done, good and faithful servant. One part of our work will consist in searching into the mind of God in his word; and here is still much room for us to be going on. It is but little we know at present; vast treasures of wisdom and knowledge are still unexplored, and the utmost diligence and zeal is still required. Another part of our work consists in keeping our own vineyard, and watching over our own hearts; and there is still much to be done in a way of self-denial, in mortifying the deeds of the body, and weakening the power of indwelling sin. We must also endeavour to recommend the Saviour to others, and to make known his salvation. And are there not many opportunities of doing good to the souls of men, and of promoting the glory of God; opportunities which we are required to seize and to improve?

2. To be always abounding in the work of the Lord, let us beware of being drawn aside by the *numberless temptations which surround us*, or of being deterred by the difficulties that may be thrown in our way. As there are many things that hinder us in entering upon this work, so there are many to induce us to forsake and to give it up. If we follow up the work of the Lord, we must be willing to make some sacrifices, and to relinquish every other work that is inconsistent with it. The works of the flesh especially must be given up, if we would abound in this work, together with the pleasures and vanities of the present world. Perhaps also we must both labour and suffer reproach, as many have done before us: but it will be well in this case to remember the answer of Nehemiah and Ezra to the enemies of Israel. Neh. vi. 3.

II. The motive here presented; "forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

1. The work of the Lord is *honourable* and glorious. Psal. cxi. 3.

It is such as reflects the highest honour upon those who are engaged in it. Paul and David both gloried in serving so good a Master, and even angels find their bliss in being ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation.

2. The work will be followed with an *infinite reward*. The resurrection to eternal life ensures this, and a blessed immortality is before us. God is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love, but will cause it to be written in the book of his remembrance. Heb. vi. 10. Mal. iii. 16, 17. It is also attended with present recompense: he that labours in this vineyard shall eat the fruit thereof, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Matt. xix. 28, 29.

3. The more we abound in this work the more *delightful it will become*. Gracious habits are like other habits, they are strengthened by exercise. The more we indulge in sin the more we may, and the more we do for God the more we may. The more we are given to prayer the more we shall desire to pray, and the less we engage in it the less we shall be inclined, till we may almost feel disposed to live without it. It is the same with every other holy duty; and therefore it is of the greatest importance to be always abounding in the work of the Lord.

4. *Time is short*, and there is great danger that much of our work will be left undone. Our blessed Lord was the only one who could truly say, 'I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.' The most diligent and faithful of his servants come far behind; and when they have done all, they are but unprofitable servants.

How necessary to enquire, what are we about; and whom do we serve? The Master will soon come to reckon with us; and blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. Luke xii. 43.

ENCOURAGEMENTS TO PRAYER.

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you.—John xv. 7.

It was the great design of our Lord at this time to strengthen the hearts of his disciples: for this purpose he told them whither he was going, and the reason why: ch. xiv. 2. xvi. 7. Previous to his departure he was concerned to prepare the way for a future communication with his sorrowful disciples, and informs them in the text by what means it is to be preserved. Prayer is here encouraged by the promise that we shall have whatsoever we may ask, on the condition that we keep up a close and intimate union with the Saviour.

I. Notice the things to which the promise is made: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you."

1. It is here supposed that in order to our having access to God, we

must be *in Christ Jesus*, or united to him as the branch in the vine; and this is by believing on his name. Great stress is laid upon this in the Scriptures: 'he that hath the Son hath life, but he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.' To be spiritually united to the Lord, and to be of one heart with him, is that which gives us an interest in all his blessedness. 1 Cor. i. 30. Ephes. i. 7.

2. The union must be *abiding:* if ye "abide" in me, and my words "abide" in you. Some were in Christ Jesus by a mere profession, like Judas, who did not abide, but were taken away, like a withered branch. Those who have no root in themselves turn aside when temptations and persecutions arise, and by and by they are offended; but it is not so with real christians, for they abide in him. Others turn aside when the example is given, and cleave to Christ no longer; but real believers can neither leave nor forsake him. John vi. 68.

3. The union must be *mutual:* not only must we abide in Christ, but his truth also must abide in us; and thus there is a mutual interest and indwelling between Christ and his people, as in ver. 4. His words abiding in us is one of the modes by which true believing is expressed; it is receiving the truth in love, and retaining the love of it to the end of life. To the unbelieving Jews, our Lord said, 'My word hath no place in you:' they could not receive his doctrine, for their hearts were utterly averse. John viii. 37. But Christ's disciples did receive it: and where his truth is cordially embraced it will become a well of water, springing up to everlasting life. John xvii. 8.

II. The promise itself, or the connection there is between Christ's words abiding in us, and our prevalence in prayer. "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

1. The *dwelling of the truth in us* is that which denominates us christians, or real believers, and this is essential to acceptable prayer. Without this there can be nothing good in us or done by us, for without union and communion with the Saviour we can do nothing, ver. 5. Without faith in him we have no interest in his mediation, none in his intercession, for he offers only the prayers of the saints. Rev. viii. 3.

2. If Christ's words abide in us they will impart *a spirit of prayer*, and teach us what to pray for as we ought. It is by imbibing the doctrines of the gospel, that we are made to see and feel our weakness and unworthiness. The gospel leaves the sinner nothing to glory in, but abases him in the dust; and if we approach God acceptably, it must be in this way only. If Christ's words abide in us we shall be filled with humility, and all our pleadings will be founded on the mercy promised for his sake. Heb. iv. 16.

3. If Christ's words abide in us, they will inspire us with *holy confidence* in God's mercy and truth, and so render us importunate and successful in prayer. This is the Spirit of adoption which is given to those who are the sons of God, and this it is that enables us to offer the prayer of faith, which never fails of success. Hence when Moses interceded for Israel, he pleaded the promise and faithfulness of God, and his prayer was answered, for God will always hear the prayer

of faith. Exod. xxxii. 10—14. When Solomon prayed for the people of Israel, that God would do and forgive, his plea was founded on the covenant of promise, and his prayer was heard. 1 Kings viii. 25. Hezekiah did the same, and was successful. Isai. xxxvii. 14. The apostles pleaded the name of Jesus, and this must be all our plea. Acts iv. 30.

4. If the words of Christ abide in us they will *regulate all our desires*, so that being kept from asking amiss, or what is contrary to the will of God, we may "ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us." The words of Christ not only give a spirit of prayer, but teach us how to pray, and to ask for what is most acceptable in the sight of God; and then we may know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. 1 John v. 14, 15.

(1) Learn from hence the importance of *receiving and loving the truth*, as it is in Jesus. If we are indifferent to that, we shall be cold and indifferent to prayer. Hence those who reject the gospel do not pray at all, nor those who do not believe. Some there are who once were praying men, but having given up the words of Christ, and gone into some false system of religion, they have given up prayer altogether.

(2) The reason why the prayers even of good men are not *more successful* is, that we do not drink sufficiently into the spirit of the gospel, and therefore have not the spirit of adoption. More faith would render us more fervent, and more successful.

SALVATION FROM THE WRATH TO COME.

And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come.—1 Thessalonians i. 10.

The great and leading truths of the gospel are like daily bread; they are what we must live upon, and inwardly digest. Hence it is that we often need to have our minds stirred up by way of remembrance, though we know these things already, and have frequently, heard them before.

The passage now in view is highly interesting, and presents us with three things particularly worthy of notice; namely, our exposedness to wrath—our deliverance by the mediation of Christ—and the motives from thence arising to wait for his second coming.

I. Our exposedness to divine wrath, even the wrath to come.

1. This affecting truth reminds us that we are *guilty*, and that by sin we have incurred the displeasure of God; otherwise there would have been no wrath. But we are now by nature children of wrath, a seed of evil doers, and all the curses of the law stand against us.

As we have grown up to maturity we have multiplied transgression, adding iniquity unto iniquity; and the nature, the number, the aggravations of our sins, have inflamed the wrath of God still more against us. Also since we have known the Lord, our sins have been still increasing, and have rendered us still more liable to wrath: and if thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, oh Lord, who shall stand?

2. The wrath to which we are exposed is of all others the most dreadful, because it is *the wrath of Almighty God.* The wrath of a king is said to be as the roaring of a lion, and the wrath of one man or of one nation against another is dreadful; but all this is as nothing to the wrath and vengeance of God. We sometimes dread the wrath of men more than we need to do; but here our deepest apprehensions come infinitely short of the reality. Who knoweth the power of thine anger? Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. Psal. xc. 11. Heb. x. 30, 31.

3. "Wrath to come" implies *a reservation of wrath*, hereafter to be inflicted. There is some wrath in this world, and a mixture of it is found in all our sorrows and afflictions; and upon the wicked especially it is often poured out with fury, as upon the Jewish nation. 1 Thess. ii. 16. But the full infliction of God's displeasure is reserved for the day of wrath, and of endless perdition. It is like a cloud which has been gathering before the storm, and which will burst the heavier at last.

4 "Wrath to come" may also denote its *eternal duration.* It will always be wrath to come, and when eternal ages have passed away it will be still the same. The gulf of perdition is impassable, a lake of fire which burneth for ever and ever. This consideration, connected with the immortality of our being, renders our salvation of infinite moment; and deliverance from the wrath to come is the most stupendous of all possible events. What will a man give in exchange for his soul; or what will it profit him if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

II. Our deliverance from this wrath, by Jesus the Son of God.

There are two or three things pertaining to this deliverance, which should never be overlooked—

1. As it respects the Lawgiver, it is highly *honourable*, being effected in a way that is perfectly consistent with all the claims of justice and of truth. It is one of the great peculiarities of the gospel, that it brings glory to God in the highest, while it proclaims peace upon earth, and good-will to men. Father, glorify thy name, was the language of the suffering Redeemer; and he did glorify it, in providing such a substitute for us. God can now be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. Rom. iii. 25, 26. If we had been delivered from the wrath to come without the intervention of a Mediator, there might have been some grace in it, but no justice, for the law would have been dishonoured, and the government of God impeached. But Christ hath delivered us, not by breaking open the prison doors, and setting us free, but by paying the ransom price, and satisfying the demands of jus-

tice on our behalf. He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, by being made a curse for us.

2. In regard to the Saviour, he delivered us at an *infinite expense.* He who was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich. He who was in the form of God, took on him the form of a servant, and made himself of no reputation, but humbled himself unto death, even the death of the cross. Our redemption was effected by Christ's coming into our place, bearing our griefs, and carrying our sorrows. He was made under the law, under the curse, and endured the wrath of God in our stead; he came under the power of death, and descended into the grave, that he might deliver us from going down to the pit. His infinite dignity made all this wonderful, and his love in giving himself for us will be the wonder of eternal ages, "even Jesus who delivered us from the wrath to come."

3. In reference to ourselves, this deliverance is *full and free, and everlasting.* Salvation is perfect and complete in all its parts, and nothing can be added to it. It is a salvation from all sin, and from all misery, extending to the uttermost of our need, and to every case of extremity. The salvation is also as free as it is full and complete. If we could have conceived of such a gift, or could have asked for it, there would be grace unspeakable in its bestowment: but the Saviour came unasked and undesired, and in his love and in his pity he redeemed us. Or if our sins had all been past when he came to lay down his life for us, there might have been some extraneous motive; but it was when we were yet without strength, and while we were yet enemies, that Christ died for us. Rom. v. 6—8. He hath likewise saved us with an everlasting salvation, and obtained eternal redemption for us. There is no more wrath, no more curse; and those who believe in him shall never come into condemnation. John v. 24. Rom. viii. 1.

III. The motives arising from this subject, to our waiting for the second coming of Christ.

The coming of Christ to judgment would be an object of dread, rather than of desire, were it not for the important truth recorded in the text; for that will be the time when the wrath of God will burst forth in all its fury. But if Jesus hath already delivered us from it, his final advent becomes an object of intense desire.

1. Because he will then appear as *the Saviour*, "even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come." He will come to proclaim the jubilee, to raise the bodies of his saints, to acquit them at his bar, and give them an abundant entrance into his everlasting kingdom. He will come without sin unto salvation, and will give a crown of righteousness to all them that love his appearing.

2. He will come to put an *end to the empire of sin*, and completely to destroy the works of the devil. The foundation of this was laid in his sufferings on the cross, by his resurrection from the dead, and the progress of his gospel; but the consummation of all will be at his second coming, when he will create new heavens and a new earth

wherein dwelleth righteousness. Hence the coming of the Lord Jesus is an object of intense desire, not only to all his people, but to the whole creation. Rom. viii. 22, 23.

How important then to be prepared for this event, to be disengaged from the present world, to be diligent in holy duties, and to be found in a waiting posture for the coming of the Lord.

What a motive to patience under injuries, knowing that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh; and for humility and resignation under his mighty hand, seeing that in a little time he will wipe away the tears from all faces.

How needful to examine ourselves, and see that we truly believe in his holy name, and have fled to him for refuge; otherwise his being a Deliverer from the wrath to come will be of no avail. Only those who are found in him will be safe; the unbeliever is still under the curse, and without a place of refuge.

THE UNBELIEVER'S CONTEMPT OF CHRIST.

We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is.—John ix. 29.

A most interesting account is here given of the cure of a blind man, who puzzled and confounded the unbelieving Jews by the force of his testimony in favour of Jesus. Like many other unbelievers, they attempt to deride what they are unable to confute; and while they pretend to reverence the authority of Moses, they pour the utmost contempt upon the Saviour.

I. Examine the reason they give for rejecting Christ.

What they say of Moses is very true: "God spake unto him." He appeared to him in the burning bush, and gave him a commission to redeem his people. The Lord also stood by him while contending with Pharaoh to let Israel go, he wrought many signs and wonders in Egypt by his hand, became his guide through the wilderness, and spoke with him face to face on Mount Sinai. He likewise gave him the law on two tables of stone, and the whole of the ceremonial for the people of Israel. The statement therefore is true, that God spake by Moses.

But the contrast they draw between Moses and Christ, is full of wickedness and enmity—

1. Notice their insinuation, *as if Moses and Christ were at variance*, though in truth they were not. Moses was a believer in Christ, and wrote of him, and esteemed even the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. Moses foretold the coming of Christ, his character and work, and Christ was the great fulfiller of his

law. Nothing therefore could be more derogatory to both, than to represent them as hostile to each other.

2. Their *affected ignorance of Christ:* "We know not from whence he is." Had they wished to be made acquainted with the evidences of his mission, they might have known "whence he is," and what are his claims to divine authority, as easily as they could demonstrate the mission of their prophet and lawgiver. Did Moses attest his mission by miracles? So did Christ, and by miracles of mercy, instead of those of judgment and fiery indignation. Such was the argument of the poor blind man: Why herein is a marvellous thing, said he, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes: ver. 30. Again: did Moses teach the way of God in truth? So did Christ. Still more, he taught the way of salvation. The unreasonableness and perverseness of these unbelievers is such as no argument, no evidence can satisfy. They sometimes object to Christ because they did *not* know whence he is, and at others, because they *did* know whence he is. John vii. 27. Such is the blinding and hardening nature of unbelief.

3. Their utter *contempt of Christ:* "As to this fellow," we know not whence he is. Well might the prophet say, 'He was despised and rejected of men, one whom the nation abhorred;' nor was it the least part of our Lord's humiliation, that he submitted to such treatment for our sakes. But behold, all they that are incensed against thee shall be confounded, they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. Isai. xli. 11.

II. Observe the preference which wicked men show to the righteous dead, in comparison of the righteous who are living.

"We know that God spake unto Moses," said they, and "we are Moses' disciples," But Moses himself was set at nought in his own day, as well as Jesus; and their forefathers conspired against him and against Aaron, as they themselves did against the Lord and his Anointed. The prophets also met with similar treatment. Elijah, Jeremiah, and Amos were all contemned and persecuted; but when dead, the Pharisees and hyprocrites build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous. Matt. xxiii. 29. It has been the same with popery, as with corrupted judaism: they canonized and worshipped dead saints, and murdered living ones. Formalists in our own day praise Christ and his apostles, but hate those who preach and live as they did, and walk in their steps. They also admire and extol the martyrs, but deride the man who suffers loss for Christ's sake, or discovers any zeal in his righteous cause. They likewise commend the reformers of latter times, but cannot endure their doctrine, nor those who follow their example.

And how is all this to be accounted for? Why,

1. *Time gives a sanction to things,* which at first were either condemned, or but little regarded. Departed goodness is often admired where it is not loved, and those who go with the multitude will join in the general commendation. It is commonly thought right to

speak well of Christ, as it is more congenial with the prevailing sentiment of the day, especially among the moral and respectable part of the community; and therefore men will do it, whatever be their aversion to the true spirit of christianity.

2. The carnal mind *loves a dead religion better than a living one.* Men have no objection to acknowledge a God, but he must be without any living authority, and not interfere with the concerns of the present world. They have no objection to his own laws, as they are written in the bible, but they must not be brought into operation, or hold men accountable for their conduct. Neither have unbelievers any objection to great and good men when they are dead, and can no longer reprove them; on the contrary they will often pay involuntary respect to their memory, though while living they took little or no notice of their virtues, except to treat them with contempt. The reason is, it requires no sacrifice to admire and commend the righteous dead; but to be attached to the living, and to imitate their example, is to be identified with them, and become a follower of Christ.

(1) We may learn from hence *what true religion is,* namely, the opposite of what was insinuated by these unbelieving Jews. It does not divide Christ and his servants, the Lawgiver and the Saviour; it teaches us to believe in Moses, and in Christ also; and that system only is true, which harmonizes alike with law and gospel. The ancient Pharisees opposed Moses to Christ, and modern theorists oppose Christ to Moses.

(2) We see what are *the evidences of our having embraced the truth,* and become the subjects of renewing grace. Personal religion is a living principle within us, it loves a living God, and delights in the living oracles. It is a life of faith and love; it teaches us to find out Christ's followers, and to love them.

(3) The reason why men are *ignorant of the nature of religion,* is because they have no desire to know it. These unbelieving Jews alleged that they knew nothing of Christ, or from whence he came: but why did they not know? He was daily teaching in the temple, and in secret he said nothing.

(4) There will come a time when those who *know Christ* and his followers shall be known and approved of him, and when those who knew him not shall be banished from his presence for ever. 2 Thess. i. 8, 9.

DESIRABLENESS OF EARLY PIETY.

My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine.— Proverbs xxiii. 15.

Under the endearing character of a "son," the wise man addresses the rising generation in his time, and expresses his paternal solicitude

for their spiritual welfare. Ministers of the gospel may likewise adopt this language, so eminently fitted to the lips of a pious parent.

The text leads to two remarks—that true religion is the only true wisdom—and that its existence and prevalence in the hearts of young people is a source of abundant joy to those who are intimately connected with them.

I. True religion is the only true wisdom.

There is a kind of wisdom which is called the wisdom of this world, and in which the children of this world are often known to excel. This sort of wisdom consists in doing well for one's self, and is frequently applauded, though an inspired writer has declared, 'that this their way is their folly.' Psal. xlix. 13, 18. No man can be truly wise without the fear of God, for that is the beginning of all wisdom. Prov. ix. 10.

1. True religion is true wisdom, because, as time is short, *it is wise to pursue those things first and chiefly which are of principal importance.* We cannot accomplish every thing, nor do all we could wish; some things must be neglected, and others preferred; and true wisdom would direct our attention to what is of the highest consequence. This then is the office of religion, which teaches us to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, that all other things may be added unto us; and also that the salvation of our souls is of infinitely greater moment, than all the perishing objects of this life. Matt. xvi. 26.

2. It is the part of true wisdom *to avoid the greater evil rather than the less.* The folly of a man would appear, if he were very anxious to shun an evil of trifling consequence, while regardless of another of serious magnitude. Herein indeed is seen much of the folly of wicked men; they are full of trouble and anxiety about the evils of the present life, but wholly unmindful of the wrath to come; are more afraid of suffering than of sinning against God; they fear him who can only kill the body, but not Him who can cast both body and soul into hell. Real religion is the opposite of all this; it makes God the great object of our fear, and also of our love.

3. It is a dictate of true wisdom *to be prepared for futurity*, and to guard against the evils to come. Prov. xxii. 3. Hence those virgins in the parable are said to be wise, who took oil in their vessels with their lamps, while the foolish ones were alarmed by the sudden appearance of the bridegroom. Matt. xxv. 1.

4. True wisdom teaches us *to commit that to the care of another, which we are unable to manage for ourselves.* Hence in sickness we confide in a physician, and in legal difficulties commit our cause to an advocate; so in like manner, religion directs us to put our trust in Christ, and commit to him the keeping of our souls until the great day.

And now if "your hearts be wise" in these things, "our hearts shall rejoice, even ours." And if your hearts be thus made wise, "your lips will speak right things;" your conversation will savour of the name of Jesus, and your meditation of him will be sweet.

II. The existence and prevalence of true religion in the minds of young persons is a source of joy and satisfaction to those who are intimately connected with them.

This is most undoubtedly the case of a godly parent, whose life is bound up with the life of his children. Such may truly say with an apostle, I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth; and the father of the prodigal will rejoice to see his lost son return home. Nor is it less certain of affording joy to a faithful minister, who watches for souls as one that must give account. As a mariner rejoices, after the dangers of a voyage, that he has brought all safe to land; even so will the minister of Jesus rejoice, to see the people of his charge brought home safe at last, and presented before the presence of the divine glory with exceeding joy. All the people of God who have known and loved your parents, and you for their sakes, will partake of this joy; and blessed be God, if they have already been furnished with this delightful satisfaction. Yea, the holy angels, and even God himself, will rejoice over you with joy and singing. Zeph. iii. 17.

The joy arising from this desirable event is one, upon which all other joys depend. A parent rejoices in all the good he sees in his children, in the exercise and improvement of their mental powers, and in their connections and future prospects; but if destitute of genuine religion, these things will avail but little, and mere external accomplishments will only become a snare.

More particularly,

1. *The love we bear to your souls* will make it matter of joy, to see you made wise unto salvation. How could we endure the thought, that those who are flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone, should be for ever lost; that they should be separated from God, from us, and from all hope for ever. Can you conceive that your parents who are going to heaven, could be content to see you left behind? Must it not be dreadful to think of having to witness against you in the last day, saying, This our son was stubborn and rebellious, and would not obey our voice? Deut. xxi. 20.

2. The recollection of *the interest we have felt in your welfare*, will heighten the satisfaction. The prayers we have offered, the counsels and warnings given, and the concern felt for your salvation, should they be all in vain, and we have only delivered our own souls; how distressing will be the thought. But oh to see our prayers answered, our labours succeeded, and our children rising up to call Him blessed.

3. *The love we bear to Christ and his cause*, makes this a matter of unspeakable importance. We long for your conversion, not only for your own sake, but also for the good of others. Christ has but few friends in the world: and shall our friends be his enemies? The good that might arise from your conversion is incalculable, both in the church and in the world.

4. It gives us *great comfort while we are with you*, to see you truly brought home to God. While your hearts are set on folly, a

godly parent finds but little peace: like Job he will be continually fearing that his children have sinned against the Lord. But oh, if you are made wise, and become the subjects of real piety; what a relief it gives to these anxieties, and how happily these fears are quieted. We then anticipate nothing but good, and are ready to say, These same shall comfort us.

5. It will afford *abundant satisfaction when we come to die*, and leave you in the world behind us. Oh to be able to say with the expiring patriarch, I die, but God shall be with you! Or to adopt the language of David to Solomon his son, I go the way of all the earth; be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man. 1 Kings ii. 2—4.

In a few years we also, who are elder than yourselves, must go the way of all the earth: but what satisfaction, to feel assured that when we are no more, you will survive to carry on that cause which has been dear to our hearts.

To those who have hitherto walked in the way of sin and folly, we would say, If you have any regard for yourself, or any love to us, think of these things, and refresh our bowels in the Lord.

MANASSEH'S CONVERSION.

Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him: and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.—2 Chronicles xxxiii. 11—13.

Though Manasseh was one of the worst of princes, he reigned longer than most of the kings of Israel, and continued to sway the sceptre for fifty-five years. He was the son of the good king Hezekiah, and appears to have been born to him after his life was prolonged in answer to prayer. In this instance we see how little we know what to ask of God. Hezekiah prayed in his sickness, his prayer is heard, his life is spared, and a son is born to him that should be a curse and a scourge to the people of Israel.

The text however gives us a brighter view of the subject; it presents to us this wicked king in the day of his calamity, full of penitence and prayer, and shows us that God can be merciful to the very chief of sinners. In order to illustrate this affecting truth, we will,

I. Take a brief review of Manasseh's life and conduct, previous to his conversion.

The evils of his life are shortly enumerated in the preceding part of this chapter, from whence we learn,

1. That *his sins were as great and as numerous as they well could be,* for there is scarcely any species of iniquity which he did not commit. He was guilty of gross idolatry, worshipping the host of heaven, and building altars in the house of the Lord. This was followed with enchantments, and all manner of uncleanness, ver. 1—8. He was guilty of great cruelty and injustice, for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. He likewise corrupted the people with his idolatries, and like another Jeroboam he made all Israel to sin, ver. 9.

2. He did all this under the most *aggravated circumstances.* He had received a religious education, being brought up by the pious Hezekiah. For heathens to have done as he did would have been a great evil, but in him it was utterly inexcusable, and showed the most awful contempt of God. Still more: he not only went on in an evil course, in despite of better information, and the remonstrances of his own conscience, but he undid all the good that Hezekiah his father had done, in order to accomplish his own wickedness. He even dared to carry his abominations into the house of the Lord, to profane his sanctuary, and to show his utter abhorence and contempt of true religion. Amidst all this he had many warnings, and yet he despised them all, and determined to persevere without any regard to consequences, ver. 10. Still farther: he went on in this course till it brought him to ruin, and all Judah and Jerusalem with him. "Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon."

II. Manasseh's conversion, and the ends to be answered by the manifestation of so much mercy.

Manasseh had nothing to present but the mere refuse of life, all had been spent in the service of sin: yet the Lord "was entreated of him, and heard his supplication."

1. We may conceive that God would hereby afford a standing evidence, *that no sinner in future need despair of mercy,* if he return to him with all his heart. Paul, having been a persecutor of the church of God, considered his own conversion as designed to show forth God's long-suffering towards the chief of sinners. 1 Tim. i. 16. If any returning sinner were rejected, either on account of the nature, the number, or the aggravation of his crimes, such an one as Manasseh would doubtless have been rejected. Nor is there any sin we have committed, that would prevent our obtaining mercy, if we return to God in the name of Jesus; not even the fearful apprehension of having sinned against the Holy Ghost, for if any one return to God by faith, it is a proof he has not committed that sin, seeing it is impossible that such should be renewed again unto repentance.

2. God would hereby show *that salvation is altogether of grace.* No one is accepted of God for being a small offender, for all are placed upon a level, and are alike dependant upon free forgiveness. 'By grace are ye saved,' says the apostle; 'and by the grace of God I am what I am.' 'God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love where-

with he loved us, hath quickened us together with Christ. He hath saved us and called us, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace.' Ephes. ii. 4—9. 1 Tim. i. 9. Such language would have but little meaning, if only some of the better sort were saved; but to show its full import, God has given us examples of mercy that overwhelm us with their magnitude.

3. Hereby a glorious proof was afforded of *the power and efficacy of the grace of God* in changing the sinner's heart. Manasseh had long been hardened in sin, and become obdurate; neither warnings nor threatenings had any effect upon him; he loved idols, and after them he would go. His heart therefore required to be wholly renewed, and nothing short of almighty power could effect it. But lo, what a change is here. He who was hardened in wickedness, is now a suppliant; the sinner is abased, he humbles himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and makes supplication unto him. Behold, he prayeth, Manasseh prayeth.

4. Additional proof is also given, *that some of our greatest blessings arise out of our greatest trials.* When Manasseh had ruined himself, his help came; and when he could no longer do without, he cried for mercy. His being bound with fetters, and carried into captivity, are the means of his being brought home to God. What cannot affliction accomplish, under the direction of an all-wise and overruling providence!

IMPROVEMENT.

1. Manasseh's being a great sinner, and finding mercy, can afford no hope to other great sinners, unless like him they return to God with all the heart; and now, since a Saviour is revealed, it must be by faith in his holy name.

2. As the chief of sinners who come in the name of Jesus shall be saved, so no one can possibly be saved in any other way, though his sins should be fewer, or less aggravated.

3. If any one should think of taking encouragement to go on in sin, because one of the greatest of sinners found mercy, let him well remember at least two things—

(1) You may remain unconverted after all, and be left in a state of impenitence and unbelief; and should this be the case, what then? You will die in your sins, and perish for your presumption.

(2) If you should ever be converted, after a long career of vice, your present conduct will be matter of pain and grief to you, all your life afterwards. Manasseh found that evil was much sooner done than undone, and it led to consequences which he little expected. His son Amon had followed his evil example, but did not follow him in returning to the Lord, ver. 22. Judah also had been corrupted by his example, and did not wholly recover from it, ver. 17. Manasseh himself, though he had turned to the Lord, was not entirely free from those evils which he had contracted; he cast down the idols, but did not wholly destroy them, and left much for Josiah to do afterwards: xxxiv. 4. The wicked reign of Manasseh was also the occasion of the final destruction of his country. 2 Kings xxi. 11—15. xxiv. 3, 4.

THE DISQUIETUDES OF LIFE.

Oh that I had wings like a dove: for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness.—Psalm lv. 6, 7.

It is not certain on what particular occasion this psalm was written, but it was in a time of trouble; probably on account of the rebellion of Absalom, and the treachery of Ahitophel. Whatever was the occasion, David was grown weary of society, weary of the throne of Israel, and of the intrigues of courtiers, and could wish himself secluded from the anxieties and cares of government; a wilderness seemed better to him than a palace.

The text, though too frequently the language of good men, shows us that pain and disquietude are mixed with all human enjoyments, and that there is a vanity in expecting to be freed from trouble by a change of situation.

I. Pain and disquietude are mixed with all human enjoyments.

A king may wish to change conditions with the meanest cottager, and find amidst the splendours of a palace enough to make him weary of his life. There is a thorn in every nest, and evil is mixed with all the good that we enjoy.

1. There were *great advantages and great enjoyments in David's situation.* He was raised to the throne under the most auspicious circumstances; all Israel were united in him, and came down to Hebron to turn away the kingdom from the house of Saul to the son of Jesse. Yet there was a disaffected party that was always a grief to him, and they seize on the first opportunity to destroy David, and place his son Absalom upon the throne. Faction and discord among the people, the teachery of his counsellors, disorder and wickedness of his family, and the prevalence of civil war, rendered him weary of his situation. The great men of the world, who are exposed to so many snares and temptations, are rather the objects of pity than of envy.

2. *We have our enjoyments in domestic life,* have each our friends and relations, and various other mercies. But all are mixed with some alloy; there is some dead fly in the pot that supplies the ointment, some grief or other which mars our portion, and we can find no lasting peace on earth. One unhappy temper may become a source of perpetual discord, one undutiful child or unfaithful friend may make us weary of life. A mocking Ishmael was the grief of Abraham's family, a profane Esau of Isaac's family, and a rebellious Absalom was the grief of David's heart.

3. We have also our enjoyments *in religious society,* and each one can say, Oh how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. But if discord invade, if disorder and confusion enter in, or if erroneous principles and sinful practices find their way

into christian society, the waters of the sanctuary are polluted, and our Bethel becomes a Beth-aven. Or if jealousies creep in, or envyings, or evil surmisings, or evil speaking, the friends of peace would begin to say, Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away, and be at rest.

But as this wish, though so commonly expressed, betrays great infirmity, we are led to notice,

II. That it is vain to expect freedom or exemption from trouble by a change of situation.

In wishing to flee from trouble we often wish for we know not what, though it is natural for persons in such a situation to want to get out of it. Hence many have wished to quit their present connections, to remove into some other part of the country; and others, worn out with oppression and proverty, have wished to leave their native land. But in general such wishes and desires only betray our weakness and infirmity, for as a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place. Prov. xxvii. 8.

When we wish to change our situation and connections in life, in the hope of finding "rest," there are certain questions that ought to be seriously entertained—

1. Is there any part of the world that is not attended with *the curse;* any place free from trouble, or where we can wholly be at rest? Is there any situation where we can be secure from pain and sorrow, or where unmixed happiness can be found? Then why wish to fly away, and wander in the wilderness?

2. Is there any place where *the wicked will not continue to do wickedly?* A great part of the troubles of life arise from the deceit, the cruelty, and injustice of mankind. These were the principal sources of David's distress, and that prompted the wish to quit his throne and his kingdom. But where can we retire, to be exempt from these evils, and where is the place of righteousness and peace?

3. Is there any part of the world *where good men have no failings?* Much of our disquietude arises from the infirmities and weaknesses of those around us, and of those we love; and many have wished to leave their friends and connections, when they have met with unkindness or neglect from religious characters. But where is the perfect man, or where the society that yields us nothing but satisfaction?

4. Could we be free from the operations of relative depravity, yet how could we be delivered from that which is *inherent;* and whither could we go, and not carry with us *an evil heart?* Various and complicated as other troubles may be, the greatest of all are produced by the corruption of our nature, and we have all of us that within us which will be as a root of bitterness, springing up to trouble us. Whither could we go to be wholly rid of this? The wilderness and the solitary place would yield us no relief.

The only refuge then, amidst the troubles of life and inward disquietude, is that which religion affords; and a good man need not wander in

the wilderness to seek for rest. He will find it in God, and his refuge will be the mercy seat: ver. 16—18.

At death the righteous shall cease from their labours, and the weary shall be at rest. There shall be no enemy to annoy, no temptation to assault the soul, no sin to pollute our joys, and no more an evil heart of unbelief, departing from the living God.

LOVE OF CHRIST IN DYING FOR US.

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.—1 John iii. 16.

John is here dwelling on his favourite subject, and that is love, love to the brethren; the grand motive to which is the dying love of Christ: ver. 11—18.

The love of God is an overwhelming subject, especially this transcendent expression of it in the gift of his Son; and our highest thoughts can never reach the lofty theme. All we can do is to meditate a little on two or three things contained in the passage before us.

I. The character of him that loved us: he is one who is both God and man.

He is expressly called "God," and yet he is supposed to be a man, or he could not have "laid down his life for us." The text therefore is one, amongst many others, which represents Christ as both God and man in one person. Isai. ix. 6. Mac. v. 2. Acts xx. 28. Rom. ix. 5. Heb. iv. 14, 15. Rev. xxii. 16.

The "love" here mentioned is ascribed to him as God, and it is the godhead of Christ that renders his love so amazing; and on this all the stress is laid in the Scriptures. John iii. 16. Ephes. iii. 19. Rev. i. 5, 6.

Love is a principle seldom known to exist, except amongst persons of the same rank, or to be exercised towards beings of an inferior order. Men love one another, and every species of animals loves its kind; but human beings can scarcely be said to love those who are greatly beneath them, or who have no intellectual existence. Yet while we are the objects of divine affection, the meanest insect approaches nearer to an equality with ourselves, than we can do to the Author of all existence, in whose sight the inhabitants of the earth are but as grasshoppers; and this it is that enhances the love of God towards us.

Still more to effect us with his kindness and benignity, the love of Christ is compared to that of a shepherd who giveth his life for the sheep; and to that of the bridegroom who giveth himself for the church. Eph. v. 25. It is his being God as well as man, that gives weight and worth to all that he has done and suffered for our sakes. Heb. i. 3.

II. The strength of his love; "he laid down his life for us."

1. This is *the highest expression of love* that can be given amongst men. If a person were willing to part with his property, or resign his liberty, to serve or save a friend, it would be much; but all that a man hath will he give for his life. David's three worthies were willing indeed to hazard their lives for his sake, when they broke through the host of the Philistines to fetch him water from the well of Bethlehem, but there are few instances of such attachment. 2 Sam. xxiii. 17. It manifested great love in Paul, to be willing to be offered up for the faith and service of the gospel. Acts xxi. 13. Phil. ii. 17; and also in Priscilla and Aquila, that they were ready to lay down their lives for the sake of that eminent apostle. Rom. xxvi. 3, 4. But the love of Christ far exceeded every thing of this sort, and for it there is no parallel. Theirs was only a common death; but he died under the curse of the law, and was made a curse for us. Theirs was only a human life that was offered up; his was the life of one who is God as well as man.

2. Christ had something *more to do than merely to die for us.* His death implies his previous incarnation, and here a wonderful chasm was to be filled up. He had to assume our nature, in order to become a sacrifice. Heb. ii. 14. viii. 3. He who was in the form of God had to take upon himself the form of a servant, to humble himself, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Phil. ii. 6—8. His laying down his life for us included every preparatory step, and all that was consequent upon his incarnation.

3. When he died *it was for enemies*, and such as were exposed to eternal death. The few instances in which one person has been induced to lay down his life for another, has been for some dearly beloved friend; but there never was an instance of a man's dying for his enemies. Rom. v. 7—10. Christ did not lay down his life for the virtuous and unoffending, but for those who were condemned to die; for those who were exposed to the wrath to come, and to all the terrors of future judgment. Such was his love, and such the deep abasement to which he voluntarily submitted for our sakes.

4. In laying down his life for us, Christ has displayed a love which eminently *distinguishes him from all others.* He did that which no one besides ever did or could do, and there is a peculiarity in his dying for us which does not exist in any other case. There were many indeed who were types of him, but it was only in a very imperfect degree, mere shadows of the real substance. Melchisedec and the priests under the law were types of our great High Priest, but it was only in their official capacity, for they were not called to suffer or to die. Joseph and David were emblems also of the Saviour, and of his love to us; they both suffered, and suffered much before they came to dignity and power; but they escaped with their lives, and were full of days and riches and honour. Jesus alone loved us, and gave himself for us; he alone loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.

III. The way in which his love may be discerned: "hereby perceive we the love of God."

The term "perceive" denotes the certainty of our knowledge, as when Peter said, We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. It is a kind of knowledge whereby the thing becomes manifest, or self-evident.

All we know of God is by those things in which he manifests himself, or by the things that are seen, and not otherwise; for him hath no man seen, or can see.

There is also a diffence between believing and perceiving. We may believe God to be almighty, but it is in his works of power that we perceive him to be so. We may believe that he is just, but we perceive it in the judgments which he executeth. We may also believe that he is good and gracious, but in the death of Christ we evidently perceive it; and in this way it is that truth comes home to the understanding and the heart.

"*Hereby* perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us." It is as if there had been no demonstration of it before, but now it is most manifest that God is love. Christ is the very image of that love, he is love itself incarnate; his coming into the world, and dying for us, is proof and evidence the most affecting and overwhelming.

This subject is the best and only real antidote for despair; for who can despair with the cross of Christ in view, that pledge and medium of abundant mercy and forgiveness.

This also affords the most powerful motive to brotherly love; for if Christ hath so loved us, "we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren."

It is this expression of the love of God towards us that will form the principal theme in heaven, and fill the ages of eternity with wonder, love, and praise. Rev. v. 11—13.

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER.

Remember me, oh my God, for good.—Nehemiah xiii. 31.

Nehemiah is a bright example of public spirit, and of holy zeal in the cause of God. Perhaps no one before his time had shown such a disinterested regard for the divine glory; and a few particulars will be sufficient to illustrate the eminence of his character.

(1) He might have lived in ease and affluence, if he had desired it, for he occupied an elevated station in the court of Persia; but he felt tenderly for others, and could not be happy while his brethren in Judea were suffering affliction and reproach, and while the holy city lay desolate and waste: ch. i. 1—3.

(2) His affectionate concern discovered itself in the first instance, by prayer and fasting, i. 4: and he mixed prayer with all his subsequent undertakings. ii. 4.

(3) He met with great opposition in the cause of God, but was not discouraged. His enemies derided him, and laughed him to scorn, when he undertook the rebuilding of the city; but his confidence was in the Lord his God, ii. 19. iv. 2. His friends also were intimidated and threw discouragements in his way, iv. 10—12.

(4) Nehemiah went forward with the work, and built the walls of Jerusalem, in the face of all opposition. Encouraged by his example the people wrought with a trowel in one hand, and a sword in the other, while he himself watched night and day till the work was accomplished.

(5) Having concluded his labours, in building the walls, setting things in order, and adjusting the civil and religious concerns of the people, he looks for no other reward than that prayed for in the text.

Let us now endeavour to point out some of the peculiar properties of Nehemiah's prayer, and consider them in reference to ourselves.

The prayer itself was short, but very comprehensive, and indicates the most eminent piety. It discovers in particular a high degree of disinterested love—of true wisdom and largeness of heart—and of faith and confidence in God.

I. We may discover in this prayer a high degree of disinterested love.

1. Nehemiah had made *many sacrifices* in order to accomplish his design, of promoting the glory of God and the good of his people. He had endured much reproach, had laboured with unwearied diligence and zeal, and denied himself of those worldly honours and advantages which he might have enjoyed in the Persian court; and for such eminent services it would have become his countrymen to have rewarded him, had they been in circumstances to do it. But this was not the case, neither did he expect it. His only hope was that God would remember him, and that would be enough: v. 19.

2. We are also called to make some sacrifices for the cause of God, and it is inconsistent with true religion to be satisfied with any recompense but *that of the divine approbation.* Interest and ambition are the ruling motives with worldly men in all their undertakings, but it must not be so with us. Simon Magus was one of this sort; he made worldly gain his object in the profession of the gospel, but he was in the gall of bitterness, and his heart was not right with God. To finish his course with joy, was all that Paul desired; and then he counted not his life dear unto him. This also was the recompense that Moses desired, after all his toils and sufferings in Egypt. And even our Lord himself looked for no other reward than the joy that was set before him; and for this he endured the cross, and despised the shame.

II. Nehemiah's prayer is expressive of true wisdom and largeness of heart.

The object of his desire was no inconsiderable one, for he asked a much larger portion than this world is able to bestow.

1. To be remembered of God for good, includes *an interest in his*

love, for it was a kind and gracious remembrance that he desired; and this is choosing the good part, which shall never be taken from us. The loving-kindness of God is better than life, and will be more to us in the whole of our existence, than existence itself can ever be. This is the portion that David prayed for, Psal cvi. 4, 5; and with this the prophet comforted himself in a season of distress. Jer. xv. 15.

2. It includes an interest in *the all-sufficiency of God*, as infinitely able to make him blessed. To be remembered of one who is unable to help, or to do us any good, would answer but little purpose. Pharaoh's butler could do but little for Joseph while he was in prison, but, said he, When it is well with thee, remember me. To have a friend in the king's presence would be of some importance. Hence also the prayer of the dying thief, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. Now God is all-sufficient, having at his command all the blessings of nature, by which he can amply repair every loss we may sustain for his sake; and all the blessings of grace, by which he can abundantly recompense and console us under all our sufferings. It was thus that God would reward the liberality of the churches of Macedonia, 2 Cor. ix. 8; and of the Philippians towards his servant Paul. Phil. iv. 19. Yea, he hath heaven and glory at his disposal, and it is impossible to say how much he is able to do for us, for it is exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. 2 Tim. i. 16—18. It was therefore true wisdom and largeness of heart that dictated this prayer.

3. It includes an interest in *the all-wise and over-ruling providence of God*; for if he remembers us in a way of mercy, he will cause all things to work together for good, even those which seem the most calamitous, and that threaten to ruin all our peace and comfort. The Lord maketh the wrath of man to praise him, and the remainder of wrath will he restrain. To be remembered for good, is therefore all that we can conceive or desire.

III. This prayer implies strong faith and confidence in God.

Nehemiah certainly believed that God would think upon him for good, and there was ground for such a hope. If we also serve him with our whole heart, we may be assured that it shall not be in vain.

1. Because *God hath promised to remember those who remember him* in his ways; and those that honour him, he will honour. Isai. lxiv. 5. A book of remembrance is even written before him, for them that fear the Lord, and that think upon his name. Mal. iii. 16, 17.

2. He hath made *a special promise to those who seek his glory*, and the good of his cause in this world. Thus he dealt with Solomon in granting his request, because he had not asked wisdom for himself, but for the good of his people Israel. 1 Kings iii. 11, 12. Hence also the honours and rewards bestowed on the followers and martyrs of Jesus, who love his cause and serve him upon earth. Mark x. 29, 30. Luke xxii. 28—30.

3. God hath also *pledged himself to fulfil his promise*, and not to forget our work and labour of love, which we have showed towards his name. Heb. vi. 10.

4. He hath often given *proof of his remembrance of such*, even in the present world, and will do so more abundantly when the book of remembrance shall be opened. Matt. xxv. 37—40. Mark ix. 41.

THE PRE-EMINENCE DUE TO CHRIST.

The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his had.—John iii. 35.

This is part of the testimony which John the Baptist bore to Christ, in answer to an insinuation suggested by the Jews, for the purpose of exciting his jealousy and suspicion, ver. 26. John feels much on this occasion, that they should attempt to place him in competition with his Lord, and rejects the idea with great force of language.

(1) He tells them that he could accept of *no honours* but such as God had given him, the principal of which consisted in his being the messenger of the Lord, to prepare the way before him, and to bear testimony of him; and they knew that he never professed himself to be the Messiah: ver. 27, 28.

(2) John makes it out that all men *coming to Christ* as they had represented, was a proof of his being the Messiah, ver. 29. He is the bridegroom, and the church is his bride. John is the bridegroom's friend, acting in subserviency, and doing his will; and this was honour enough for him. Now all things are in their proper place.

(3) He gives them to expect that things *would go on* in this direction, and that Christ would be more and more glorified, though he himself should not, ver. 30.

(4) John then illustrates the subject more fully, and *preaches Christ* to his followers, as the only way of life and salvation, ver. 31—36.

We here see how much of the evangelical ministry was possessed by John the Baptist, much more indeed than by Christ's immediate disciples, previous to the day of pentecost; and those who wish to throw him back; as though he belonged to the Jewish rather than to the christian dispensation, do him great injustice. He was more than a prophet, an evangelist, and the immediate forerunner of Christ.

In the text John speaks *as an example* to his followers, that they might learn to be of God's mind, and to honour the Saviour as he had done, without being ever-solicitous of the honour that might be due to himself.

I. Observe the love of the Father to Christ.

This is a subject on which the New Testament dilights to dwell, and the love here mentioned relates both to the person and the work of Christ.

1. The Father loveth him *as the Son of God*. Hence those

terms of endearment and filiation so often applied to Christ, as God's 'own Son,' his 'only-begotten Son,' his 'dear Son,' and 'the Son of his love.' It is the love the Father bears to him that makes the gift of Christ for us so unspeakable, ver. 16; especially the giving of him as a sacrifice for us. Rom. viii. 32. Zech. xiii. 7. Hence also the testimony given on the banks of the Jordan. Matt. iii. 17; and on mount Tabor, xvii. 5.

2. He loveth him for the sake of *his obedience unto death*, and because he gave himself for us. John x. 17. Hence also he hath highly exalted him, Phil. ii. 9; and commanded that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. John v. 23. So highly does he love the Son, that he will hear no petition but in his name, and pardon no sinner but for his sake. John xiv. 6.

3. The special proof of this love is, *that he hath given all things into his hand.* Such universal terms are difficult to interpret, on account of their extent. We who understand so few things, cannot enumerate them all, but we may mention some. The general idea is, that the Father hath delegated to him all the great concerns of his moral empire. It is for him to restore it to order, and the heavens must retain him unto the restitution of all things, Acts iii. 21: and when he shall have subdued all things, and put down all authority and power, he shall deliver up the kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all. 1 Cor. xv. 24, 28.

More particularly—

(1) All the dispensations of mercy are in the hands of Christ: it is for him to save or to destroy. John v. 21; xvii. 2. It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell, and out of his fulness we all receive. Col i. 19. John i. 16.

(2) God has entrusted him with his honour and glory. He is the Mediator betwixt God and man, and he is to act the part of a merciful and faithful high-priest. His work was to secure the honour of the Lawgiver, while he exercised mercy as a Savour; and he hath done it. John xvii. 1, 4.

(3) The Father hath committed to him the salvation of his people, their redemption from the curse, and from the grave. John vi. 39, 40.

(4) The controul of the universe is in his hands, and he is Lord of all; angels, principalities, and powers being made subject unto him. Col. i. 16; ii. 10. Ephes. i. 22.

(5) The government of the church is committed to him, and he is the only lawgiver in Zion. His will is the ground of all obedience, and even the moral law is under his authority. Matt. xxviii. 18—20. 1 Cor. ix. 21.

(6) The administration of the final judgment. The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son. John v. 22. 2 Cor. v. 10.

II. Consider the consequences arising out of this doctrine.

1. Whatever is given to Christ *is given to communicate*, like treasure committed to an almoner; and even the authority with which he is in-

vested is for the good of his church and people. He hath received gifts for men, even the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them. Psalm lxviii. 18.

2. If we desire mercy we must *come to Christ for it.* Go to Joseph, said Pharaoh to the poor of the land; and so the Lord says to us, Go to Jesus.

3. As the Father loveth the Son, and hath committed all things into his hands, so *we must follow his example*, and commit our all into his hands for time and eternity. 2 Tim. i. 12. Sure we cannot refuse to treat him with similar confidence; if we do, we are not of God. Jews and deists, under pretence of honouring the Father, reject the Son; but they will be found in the wrong at last. 1 John ii. 23.

4. At all events we must become *subject to Christ*, in one way or another; for to him every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess. He must reign till he hath put all his enemies under his feet. 1 Cor. xv. 25.

COMMUNION WITH GOD.

It is Good for me to draw near to God.—Psalm lxxiii. 28.

On comparing the afflicted state of the righteous with the prosperity of the wicked, the psalmist was tempted to infidelity, but is recovered from it by repairing to the sanctuary. There he saw the end of the wicked, and also his own vileness. He now resolves to cleave to the Lord, to follow his counsel, to seek a better portion, and to live near to God.

I. Enquire what is included in this special privilege.

Considering our original meanness and nothingness, it is wonderful that there should be any communion between God and us. Job thought it to be almost incredible, ch. ix. 16. Considering also the great moral distance there is between God and us, it is still more so; and Solomon was overwhelmed with the magnificence of the idea, that God should, in very deed dwell with man upon the earth. Yet so it is; and the godly in all ages have been allowed to draw near to him. Enoch and Noah walked with God, Abraham and David communed with him, and all that are of a humble and contrite spirit enjoy this inestimable privilege. Isai. lxvi. 1, 2.

It was the office of the high priest to draw near on behalf of the people of Israel, and when he entered within the vail, all the people stood without, praying for the acceptance of his offering and intercession. Luke i. 10. Psal. xx. 1—4.

Under the gospel we draw nearer still, for the vail of the temple is rent, and we are all allowed to enter into the holy place. Heb. x. 19, 20.

Our High Priest also appears in the presence of God for us, and we have boldness and access by the faith of him. Ephes. iii. 12. Heb. iv. 14—16.

There are however several prerequisites in order to our drawing near to God—

1. It includes the *use of all appointed means*, for it is only in the path of duty that God hath promised to meet with us and bless us. Isai. lxiv. 5. Prayer is one of the principal means of nearness, and it is from off the mercy seat that the Lord communes with his people. Exod. xxv. 22. Reading the Scriptures, attending upon public worship, and the ordinances of Christ, are all necessary to this communion. Closet duties help us in public services, and all have a reciprocal influence on each other.

2. Self-examination, and the *renunciation of every evil*, are indispensable to our drawing near to God. Psal. lxvi. 18. When Jacob went up to Bethel, he purified himself and his household from all idols, and built an altar to the Lord. Exod. xxxv. 1—4. When David compassed the holy altar, he washed his hands in innocency, Psal. xxvi. 6: and when we draw near, we must cleanse our hands, and have our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience. James iv. 8. Heb. x. 22.

3. That we rest not in the means, but *aim at communion with God* in them. The solemn duty of prayer especially must not be attended to superficially, nor performed as a duty merely, but be regarded as the means of approaching unto God, and of having intimate fellowship with him. Much of this may be seen in Abraham's intercession for Sodom, Gen. xviii. 32, 33: and in Job's pleading with the Lord. Job xxiii. 2, 3.

4. We must keep our eye fixed upon *our great High Priest*, who appears in the presence of God for us. No man cometh unto the Father but by him, and every blessing must be sought for his sake. John xiv. 6—13. Heb. vii. 25.

5. It is necessary that we come in *humble confidence of his mercy*, believing in his willingness to bless and do us good. Heb. x. 22. James i. 6. John v. 14.

6. It includes that *spirit of adoption*, by which we can call him our Father, and plead with holy freedom before him, as the children of his family, and the heirs of eternal life. Gal. iv. 6. 7. Ephes. iii. 12.

II. The advantages resulting from this nearness to God.

1. "It is good for us" to draw near, if we consider *the various duties* we have to perform: for what can we do without this? How can we preach, or how can we hear, or how read the word, to edification or comfort? Without nearness to God, spiritual exercises will become burdensome and unprofitable, and, like Doeg, we shall be "detained before the Lord."

2. If we consider the *temptations* to which we are liable, our only safety lies in this. Drawing near to God is like turning to our strong hold, as prisoners of hope; and they that are far from him shall perish. Ver. 27.

3. There are seasons in which we are greatly *burdened with guilt:* and though we then need to come to the altar more than at any other time, we are then most apt to stand at a distance, and restrain prayer before the Lord. Yet we must come, if ever we be healed and pardoned; and it is good for us to draw near, and confess our sins before him. Rom. iii. 25. 1 John i. 9; ii. 1, 2.

4. We are liable to be overwhelmed with the *troubles and sorrows of life*, and there is no relief like this. Cast thy burden on the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: be careful for nothing, but make your requests known unto God. Psal. xxvii. 14; lxii. 8. Phil. iv. 6.

5. We are constantly in danger of *spiritual declension*, and of losing a sense and savour of divine things; and there is no way of keeping up the life and power of religion, but by drawing near to God. Psal. lxv. 4; xv. 8.

6. By this it is that we are meetened for *heaven and glory*, and our approaches to him on earth are the prelude of our dwelling in his presence for ever. Psal. xvi. 11.

These considerations may reconcile us to trials and afflictions, as they furnish us both with matter and occasion for prayer, and are often the principal means of driving us near the Lord.

WARNINGS AGAINST PRESUMPTION.

Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.—1 Corinthians x. 9.

The Corinthian church had many prevailing irregularities and disorders, and Paul uses various means to remove them. Among other things he warns them, by holding up the example of Israel, observing that these things were intended as warnings to us. The whole of God's conduct towards Israel was designed to display the glory of his character, while their conduct clearly showed what is in man, even under the greatest advantages. Nothing strikes the mind so strongly as facts.

The history of Israel not only shows what is in man, but also God's displeasure asainst man's depravity. Thousands of them perished for worshipping the golden calf, and for acts of uncleanness; multitudes of others were destroyed by serpents for tempting Christ, some were consumed by fire from heaven, some by earthquakes, and the whole generation were cut off at last for murmuring against God. Now as the censers of Korah and his company were ordered to be preserved as a memorial of this event, and a warning to all succeeding ages, so the apostle exhibits the fact mentioned in the text as a warning to all Christians.

The people of Israel are here said to have "tempted Christ;" of course Christ existed long before his incarnation, or the history of the temptation in the wilderness could not be true. He also appeared to the

patriarchs, was with the Church in the wilderness, gave the law on Mount Sinai, and guided them all the way to Canaan.

I. Explain the caution given us in the text.

To "tempt" means to try and grieve his Holy Spirit, to try his love and faithfulness, by our presumption, and by our sins.

1. Then let us beware that we do not *presume on what Christ has done for us* so as to make light of sin, for this would be to tempt Christ. Sin is not less evil in itself, nor less dangerous to us, in consequence of the atonement; nor are we so to depend on Christ's righteousness for our justification, as to supersede the necessity of watchfulness and prayer.

2. Let us beware that we do not neglect the *means of grace and salvation*, under the pretence of trusting in Christ, for this would be to tempt and grieve his Holy Spirit. Too many treat the blessings of this life in this way, as if they were to come without any effort on their part; and too many the blessings of salvation, as if they were to be put in possession of them by some mysterious agency, unconnected with any concern of theirs. This, however, is not trusting in Christ, but tempting him.

3. Beware of making the *promises of perseverance* an occasion for our own inattention and negligence, and of running into danger. Thus the Corinthians did, by going to the idol's temple, and eating with idolaters, under pretence that an idol was nothing in the world, ver. 14, 21. When Christ himself was tempted, he did not make such a use of the promises: and if we do, we are guilty of the most awful presumption. Matt. iv. 6, 7.

4. Beware lest *difficulties in the way to heaven*, should make us wish we had never set out. This was one of the great sins of the people of Israel, when they tempted Christ in the wilderness; and many of them were destroyed of serpents. Num. xxi. 5, 6.

5. Let us take heed that we do *not murmur at our lot*, in the present world, and wish to go back again to Egypt. This was another of the sins of Israel, Exod. xvii. 2, 3; and many of these murmurers were destroyed of the destroyer. 1. Cor. x. 10. Remember that Christ is head over all things for his church, and is able to make all things work together for our good.

6. Take heed that we do *not overlook our mercies*, and dwell only on our miseries. How apt are we to think, if we had but such a good, and were but rid of such and such an evil, then how happy we should be. But are we thankful for what we have, and do we serve the Lord faithfully with the means that we possess? If not, we are like the Israelites who loathed the manna, because they had not flesh to eat.

7. Let us beware that we do not tempt Christ, so as to *provoke him to anger*; for he is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, as well as the Lamb in the midst of the throne. Psal. ii. 12.

II. Consider the reasons which should render this caution effectual.

1. Though Christ may not take vengeance at *first*, he will *afterwards*

when his wrath is kindled but a little. He bore long with the provocations of the Israelites, but at last he swore in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest. Psal. xcv. 10, 11. Heb. iv. 1.

2. If we tempt Christ, we must expect *sorer judgments* than those that befel Israel, even such as are spiritual and eternal. Heb. iii. 2, 3. Our loss will not be the loss of Canaan, but of the kingdom of heaven.

3. If we tempt Christ, and incur his displeasure, we have *no friend* left besides. There is no other Saviour, and no more sacrifice for sin; our hope is perished from the Lord. Let us then hear his voice, while it is called to-day. Heb. iii. 7.

THE PECULIAR DUTIES OF OUR DAY AND GENERATION.

For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption. —Acts xiii. 36.

The text contains a very short but comprehensive and just encomium on the character of David. The meaning is, that he served the will of God in his day, by filling up the various duties of his station; and that there is a particular line of conduct marked out for every believer, by the times and circumstances in which we live.

It is true that "the will of God" is to be the rule of duty at all times, but the times and circumstances in which we are placed direct us to those particular duties which are incumbent upon us; and while we attend to the latter, we must regard the former as the grand rule by which every duty is to be performed.

I. Enquire in what manner David served his generation by the will of God.

By reviewing the relations in which he stood to others, we shall see what was the work of his generation; and this may lead us to consider the immediate duties which we ourselves are required to perform.

1. In the early part of life, David's work was performed in *a state of comparative obscurity.* He kept his father's flock; and in doing this he served the will of God. He was a pious young man; influenced by the fear of God, and acknowledging him in all his ways. 1 Sam. xvii. 37.

2. Another part of his generation work was to *expose himself to danger in the field of battle*, and in this also he served the will of God. The same power which delivered him out of the paw of the lion and the bear, he trusted would also deliver him out of the hand of the uncircumcised Philistine. There are but few who have been called to serve God in this capacity, but there have been some, and they have done it with honour and success.

3. In another part of his life he was exposed to *the temptations and snares of a court.* He lived in Saul's family and was advanced to honour: but he so acquitted himself, that even Saul could find no fault in him, for the Lord was with him. There is no situation in life but what may be filled up with honour, and in the fear of the Lord. There were saints in Cæsar's household, and there may be such still in the courts of modern princes.

4. A part of his generation work was performed *in the wilderness,* in a state of banishment and fleeing from persecution, like a partridge to the mountain. Here also he served the will of God, here he spent some of his best hours in meditation and prayer, and in composing many of his psalms; and in this he not only served his own generation, but all the future ages of the church. Many others have had to do the will of God, in both labouring and suffering reproach; and in this way also the church of God has been served by the sufferings, the imprisonment, and the writings of the puritans, and the martyrs.

5. Another part of his work was to *ascend the throne, and govern the people of Israel.* Thus also he served the will of God, in administering justice and judgment, in putting down the wicked and exalting the righteous; and hence it was that he had so many enemies. He also used his great influence in promoting the worship and the fear of God, and setting things in order in the sanctuary. He employed his pen and his harp in the delightful service of praise and thanksgiving; and happy is it where wealth and talents and influence are thus consecrated to the Lord.

6. David was *called to quit his throne* after he had held it a number of years, and that by the rebellion of an unnatural son. Here also he served the will of God, saying, Here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him. 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26. He was content to retire again into obscurity, and to go down-hill, after he had been exalted.

7. Another part of his work was *to prepare for the building of the temple,* though it was no part of his work to build it. He collected the materials together, and did it with all his might. He set the example of a munificent subscription, and many followed it; and in all this he served his generation by the will of God. Something like this is the work in which we are to engage: we may not live to see the spiritual temple erected, but we are to prepare for it, and to hasten the coming of the latter-day glory.

II. Apply the subject to ourselves, and enquire what are the particular duties to which we are called by the times and circumstances in which we live.

There are many things incumbent on us, in common with those of past ages, according to the various relations we sustain in life; and whatever be our situation or circumstances, we are to serve the will of God in them. Besides the duties of domestic life, which demand so large a share of attention, there are others that are peculiar to the age or generation in which we live.

1. We live in a time in which there are *many departures from the truth.* Many errors prevail, and many fall away through false

doctrine. Our work is to bear testimony to the truth, and to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints; and during the reign of antichrist it is the distinguishing mark of true believers, that 'they have the testimony of Jesus.' Rev. xii. 17. Multitudes of a speculative turn are going fast into infidelity, and we are to be witnesses for God. Others corrupt the worship and the institution of Christ, and it is for us to keep the ordinances as they were delivered.

2. It is a time of great *worldly conformity*, when religion is blended with, and made subservient to, secular interests and pursuits. It behoves us therefore to come out and be separate, and by our singular devotedness to pure and undefiled religion, to shine as lights in the world. Phil. ii. 15.

3. This is a generation in which *many important events* are taking place in providence, relative to the cause of God in the world. Here it is our duty to watch, to observe the ways of God, and the operations of his hand. Luke xxi. 34. Rev. xvi. 15.

4. It is a time in which *the promises of God are hastening towards their full accomplishment*, and the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. It is our work to wait for Christ's appearance, to abound in prayer, and to go forth in active labours to meet him.

5. It is a time of *great exertion in disseminating the truth*, at home and abroad, by missionary labours, and various institutions for evangelizing the world. Our duty is to aid every such undertaking by all the means in our power, and not to say that the time is not come, for the time is come that the Lord's house should be built. Hag. i. 2. In doing this we shall serve our generation, according to the will of God.

The text reminds us that David, after he had done his generation work, " fell asleep, and was laid unto his fathers." And what a happiness it is, not to have lived in vain.

We must all soon " fall asleep," whether we have served God in our day and generation or not; and if found unprofitable servants, we shall be cast into outer darkness. Matt. xxv. 29, 30.

THE CHURCH IN THE WILDERNESS.

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.—Psalm lxxx. 1.

The history of the church in former ages, furnishes a counterpart to our own experience, both individually and collectively; and the text is in many respects applicable to ourselves.

I. View the state of the Church at this period of its history.

I. It is described as a flock, *in a state of darkness*, passing through the wilderness. Such also is our state in the present life. The world to which we go is all light, but it is not so here. Our path is frequently bewildered; and we are stumbling on the dark mountains, not knowing which way to direct our steps. Doubts and fears sometimes prevail, and we are in great perplexity about our state: for though the Lord God is our sun, the light does not always shine upon us. The daughter of Zion is also covered with a cloud, and the prospects of the public interests of religion are dark and lowering. Then how suitable the prayer: "Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth!"

2. The leader of the flock seems to be *unmindful of their complaints;* and hence the importunate request, "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel." Nothing is so trying to the righteous as God's seeming to shut his ear against their petitions and complaints. It was this that Job so deeply deplored: 'When I cry and shout, the Lord will not hear me. O that I knew where I might find him.' The church of old adopted the same mournful language: 'I sought him whom my soul loveth, but I found him not.' Yet such seasons of distress, when the Lord hides his face from us, may be needful to teach us the worth of our mercies when we do enjoy them, and to draw out our desires after God so much the more.

3. The flock is made to feel that *they cannot go on without the Shepherd.* Left alone in the wilderness, in a state of darkness, they cry out "Oh give ear: oh shine forth." We can do nothing without God, any more than they. We are workers together with him, but if left alone, we labour altogether in vain. All our duties and privileges become as dry breasts. God is to his people what the sun is to the world, what the shepherd is to the flock: if his presence be withdrawn, all light and comfort depart from us.

4. The flock, though left in darkness, *did not sink into despair*, nor wished to turn back. Their trouble and distress led to prayer, and earnest longings after the Shepherd of Israel. The design of all trying providences, and of all our inward conflicts, is to teach us to pray, and to render us importunate.

II. The pleas made use of by the church in their state of darkness and distress.

1. They plead the *character* which God has condescended to assume, and the *relation* he bore to them, as "the Shepherd of Israel." And to whom should they look, but to him who had promised to feed his flock, and to gather them in the cloudy and dark day. Ezek. xxxiv. 11—16. The engagement of Christ to guide his people through the wilderness, and to save those who believe in him, affords encouragement to faith and prayer. John vi. 39, 40.

2. They plead *his former kindness* to his people: "thou that leddest Joseph like a flock." This is looking back to that interesting period when he brought them out of Egypt, and led them through the wilderness, as Jacob did his flock, with all the gentleness of a kind and faithful shepherd. Psal. lxxvii. 20. Isai. xl. 11.

3. His *dwelling between the cherubims*, encourages them to hope and to pray. The Lord's taking up his abode in the holy city, and more immediately in the temple, was to them a token for good; and the dwelling of Christ in his church to the end of the world, is the ground of its security. His dwelling "between the cherubims," was the same as being on the mercy-seat, where he communed with his people. Here was the great propitiatory, and to this they approach in the humble confidence of faith and prayer. Exod. xxv. 22.

How great the mercy, to have a shepherd over us, and to have the Lord for our shepherd. Psal. xxiii. 1. Believers are not like the men of the world, who roam abroad unheeded and unregarded; but are under the superintendence of the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls, who will lead them safe, and bring them home. 1 Pet. ii. 25.

BENEFIT OF DIVINE CHASTISEMENT.

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.—Hebrews xii. 11.

Amongst many other things which caused the Hebrews to stumble, were the afflictions and reproaches they met with for the sake of the gospel, and these had a considerable effect upon them. The apostle therefore exhibits as an example those who had run the same race before them, and finished their course with joy. He also proposes to them the bright example of Jesus, who endured the cross, and despised the shame.

The object is to reconcile us to divine chastisements, from the consideration that they are designed for our good. But it may be objected, How can they be good, when in themselves they are so "grievous?" At present indeed they are "not joyous," but afterward they yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

I. Make a few remarks on the nature of divine chastisement.

1. It is *a kind of punishment* for sin committed. It supposes some fault, which it is intended to correct. But when men are persecuted for righteousness sake, it does not appear to be for sin. It may however be for righteousness sake on the part of man, and for unrighteousness sake on God's part; and he will sometimes suffer persecution and reproach to befal us, when we are grown cold and indifferent in his cause.

2. Though divine chastisements are a kind of punishment, yet not like that *inflicted on the wicked*, either here or hereafter. Punishment is of two kinds, vindictive, and corrective. The one is in wrath, the other in love; the one is for the good of society, the other for the

good of the individual, to recover from the evil which affliction is intended to correct.

3. As chastisements are intended for correction, so they are usually *adapted to bring sin to remembrance.* 1 Kings xvii. 18. If God were to take away our religious privileges, and expose us to persecution, we might be brought to remember our former neglect and ingratitude. It is the same in personal and domestic trials, which are commonly adapted to remind us of the commission of some sin, or the neglect of some duty. God often punishes the neglect of private duties, by withholding his blessings from other duties, and family disorders are visited by afflictions and distresses, as in the case of David.

4. The Lord uses *various means* in chastising his people. Sometimes he does it by his own hand, in sending afflictive or bereaving providences. Sometimes he employs the hand of an enemy; and thus he punished Israel, by raising up Nebuchadnezzar against them. Sometimes he rebukes us by means of our friends, and by the ministry of the word. All is designed to bring sin to remembrance, and to humble us in his sight.

II. Observe in what respect divine chastisements are to be esteemed a good, and how it is that they are rendered beneficial.

1. They are *not good*, as producing any *immediate joy.* On the contrary, the immediate effect is grief, or they would not be chastisements, and could not answer the end intended. Believers it is true have rejoiced in tribulation, but not on its own account: it is painful in itself, but they have looked forward to the end of all.

2. The way in which they produce good is, that *afterwards* they yield "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." By this fruit is meant, not righteousness itself, but rather the effect which righteousness produces, and that is, quietness, peace, and assurance for ever. Isaiah xxxii. 17. In some instances they have wrought very unhappily for a time, by stirring up the corruptions of the heart; but "afterwards" they have had a very different effect. It was thus with Ephraim, though at first he was like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. Jer. xxxi. 18, 19. Jonah also complained heavily at first, but was afterwards humbled and comforted. Jonah ii. 7. In some cases, divine chastisements work righteousness at the time, and yet do not immediately produce the peaceable fruits of it; this is reserved till afterwards. In many a pious man they work conviction, repentance, submission, and patience; and afterwards, peace of mind, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Rom. v. 3—5. Lam. iii. 19—21.

3. In order that divine chastisements may have a proper effect, we must be *exercised thereby.* This certainly denotes that we must feel them, and be deeply affected with them. Some men indeed pretend to brave affliction, and account it mean and unworthy to feel and be humbled under it; but this is great presumption. David was a man of courage, yet he was 'afraid of God's judgments,' and trembled at them. The patience also of some men is little better than stupidity; their hearts are not "exercised" by sorrow and trouble. But it becomes us to be

humbled under divine rebukes, or we shall be guilty of "despising the chastening of the Lord," ver. 5. It also includes the exercise of our graces. We may feel much, and yet not feel right, under affliction; we may so feel as to faint and be discouraged, ver. 5.

(1) Let us be thankful that our afflictions as christians are "chastisements," sent to correct, and not to destroy; sent in love, and not in anger. 1 Cor. xi. 32. Rev. iii. 19.

(2) If we are ready to faint in the day of adversity, let us look to Jesus, and remember his sorrow. Heb. xii. 2.

(3) Seeing that afflictions are a principal means of our sanctification, let us learn to be reconciled to them. If we wish our hearts to be set right, to be humbled, weaned from the world, we shall not think much of our sufferings, but shall say with the psalmist, Truly, God is good to Israel.

(4) If afflictions are not sanctified, they will tend only to aggravate our guilt. Prov. xxiii. 25.

DANGER OF SELF-DECEPTION.

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.—Proverbs xiv. 12.

However diversified the pursuits of men, all are in search of happiness. Some seek it in the things of this life, and leave the concerns of futurity unheeded. This their way seems wise to them, in making sure of what is, though it can scarcely appear to themselves to be "right." Others are seeking the gratification of their depraved appetites in a way that is opposite to their own consciences, and this therefore cannot seem to be right. The text then must be understood of those who think well of their own way, but who are under a gross deception. It is a painful thought, that there not only are multitudes who know that they are in a wrong path, but many more who think they are right even while "the end thereof are the ways of death."

The following considerations may account for this kind of self-deception, or show how it is that men walking in a wrong way, may nevertheless think it to be right.

1. Much of this is to be attributed to the *influence of education.* We are not aware of the innumerable instances in which we are influenced by the principles imbibed in early life, yet this first bias of the mind may make things appear to be right, which in themselves are utterly wrong, and lead to fatal consequences. How else could it be accounted for, that Saul of Tarsus should not only be induced to persecute the church of God and waste it, but to think that he ought

verily to do it? Thus it is that many are attached to certain forms and systems of religion, because they have been brought up to them, and for no other reason. In different places, but from a similar cause, paganism, mahomedanism, corrupted judaism, popery, and other superstitions, are all thought to be right, though the end thereof are the ways of death. Being the religion of their forefathers, it has altogether the appearance of being right. It is the same where the truth is only partially received, and some of its leading doctrines rejected; and where they teach for doctrines the commandments of men.

2. This kind of deception arises in part from *the power of example*, and the countenance of the generality. The example of those around us has an inconceivable influence on our principles and conduct. A variety of things positively evil, and which might easily be known to be so, appear nevertheless to be right, because they are practised and pursued by a large portion of mankind. Setting our affections on things on the earth is a great evil, condemned in the Scriptures; and yet this is the way of the world. The wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous whom the Lord abhorreth. To a great majority of the Jewish nation it seemed right to be of the same religion as their rulers, though it included a rejection of Christ and his gospel; and it is much the same with the great bulk of other nations.

3. The *favourable opinion which good people may form of us*, may make our way seem to be right. Our chief acquaintance may be with serious people, we may go with them to the house of God, and enjoy a portion of their esteem. They may hope that we are the followers of Jesus, and treat us as such; and so we may conclude that we are right, and that all is well. This seems to be the case with the foolish virgins, who in the parable are associated with the wise. But if we wish not to be deceived, we must not trust to the judgment or good opinion of any one, but desire that God would search us and set us right.

4. Many a way seems to be right, merely *because it is our own way*. It is the way which we have chosen, and to which we have been accustomed. It is often seen in temporal things, that a man thinks his way to be right, because it is his way; and it is much more so in the concerns of religion. Hence many evils may cleave to us, and we see nothing of their sinfulness. We may even be altogether selfish and covetous, and not be aware of it; full of pride, and not perceive it; worldly minded, vain and conceited, and yet think that all is right.

5. The *resemblance between real religion and what has only the appearance of it*, may be another cause of this deception. In many instances this will make a way appear to be right, though it is leading us on to destruction. Self-righteousness has a seemly appearance, and promises fair for the kingdom of heaven; for it will be pleaded that we must be religious and devout, and do something towards our salvation. Yet it is certain, that by the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified. Those who rest in a few delusive impressions and feelings, by which the heart is moved, but not changed, may flatter themselves with being the subjects of true religion; and those also who

possess a mere speculative acquaintance with the gospel, are often very confident of being right, and of having truth on their side.

Those who rest in a partial reformation, and who comply with some of the duties of religion, may think that all is safe and right, while they are strangers to the love of God, and not renewed in the spirit of their mind. Now the end of all these things is death; yet they seem to be right, and bear some resemblance to true religion. Thus, in innumerable ways, are we in danger of being deceived, and falling into perdition.

Let us then look well to our way, and see that it be such as God has marked out for us in his holy word. Let us examine well our motives, and see that we are influenced by better principles than those of mere education, or example, or the good opinion of others. See that our hearts be truly right with God, and that we are walking in the way that is everlasting.

BEATIFIC VISION OF GOD.

As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.—Psalm xvii. 15.

This is the language of a persecuted saint, who derives comfort from considering the wicked as the sword in God's hand for punishing and correcting his people, ver. 13, 14. The psalmist also derives comfort under his affliction, by comparing his own lot with that of his persecutors. They had their all in this life; his was in the life to come, ver. 15.

The language in the text is also the language of one who had great things in prospect, even as to the present life; yet by faith he overlooks them all, and fixes his affections on things above. Like the ancient patriarchs he looked for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

1. Notice the objects on which his heart was set.

These are three, namely, that he might "behold the face of the Lord" —that he might behold it "in righteousness"—and finally "awake with his likeness."

1. He longs to *behold the face of the Lord.* This figurative mode of expression seems to convey two or three distinct ideas:—(1) By beholding the face of the Lord is meant *the enjoyment of his favour*, of that special favour which he beareth to his people. Hence to seek his face is to seek his favour; and for God to lift up the light of his countenance upon us is to be favourable to us, and to look upon us with kind regard.—(2) To behold his face is to be admitted to *intimate communion with him*, and to enjoy that intercourse which is peculiar to a friend.

When Absalom longed to see the king's face, it was that he might have free access, and that the former intercourse might be renewed. 2 Sam. xiv. 32. So believers are said in this world to walk in the light of God's countenance, and to have fellowship with him; their prayer also is, that he would not cast them out of his sight, nor take his Holy Spirit from them. Psal. li. 11.—(3) David's desire to behold the Lord's face may ultimately refer *to the world to come*, where his presence will be enjoyed for ever. The expression indeed appears too strong to be fully realized in the present life. We are said to behold his works, and also the beauty of the Lord, as reflected in his word. We likewise see his power and glory in the sanctuary, but it is only as through a glass darkly, by means and ordinances of divine appointment. Psal. xxvii. 4. lxiii. 2. To "behold his face," is the privilege of glorified beings, and theirs only. Matt. xviii. 10. This then was David's wish, and David's prayer: and oh how desirable is this ineffable vision of God and the Lamb! It is pleasant for the eye to behold the sun, and nature revolts at the thought of having the eyes closed in death. Isai. xxxviii. 11. But how much more desirable to behold the face of God, though it be only by faith; there is a satisfaction in it, to which no earthly enjoyment can be compared. What then must be the bliss of seeing him as he is, without a vail between.

2. David's desire was to behold his face *in righteousness*. Righteousness is necessary to our standing before God in two respects; in a way of merit, and also in a way of meetness. The former is by the righteousness of another, the latter by a righteousness that is wrought within us; the language of the text is applicable to both, and both are necessary to salvation.—(1) Saints under the Old Testament as well as under the New, often speak of a righteousness *without us*, which is imputed or accounted to them that believe. Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. It is also described as a righteousness from the God of our salvation, in which all the seed of Israel shall be justified, and shall glory. Psal. xxiv. 5. Isai. xlv. 24, 25. Jer. xxiii. 6. It is this righteousness that is necessary to our standing before God, and beholding his face with joy; and no one can appear in his presence without it. Psal. cxxx. 3. This alone is the ground of the christian's hope and confidence. Phil. iii. 9.—(2) There is also a righteousness necessary to our standing before God, *in a way of meetness;* for without holiness no man shall see the Lord. We must be presented faultless before the presence of his glory; and in order to this we must be washed in the Saviour's blood, and be cleansed from all our iniquities, as well as clothed with his righteousness. And only in this way can we see the face of God and live. Matt. v. 8. Heb. xii. 14. Jude 24.

3. Another thing which David desired of the Lord was, that he might *awake with his likeness.* Death is a sleep in reference to the resurrection, and this is an alleviating thought in the prospect of our dissolution. Death to the believer is a falling asleep in Jesus, sinking as it were into his arms, and reclining on his bosom. But we shall wake again; and, endearing thought, it will be "with his likeness." The soul will be perfectly conformed to his moral attributes, and the body fashioned according to the glorious body of Christ. Phil. iii. 21.

There will be no evil appetite tempting us to sin, no tendency to affliction or to death; the body will then become a fit companion for the soul, and both a habitation for God through the Spirit. These are the objects on which the heart of David was set, and of supreme desire to all that fear and love the Lord.

II. The decidedness of David's choice, in reference to these objects.

This is expressed by the contrast which he forms between himself and the men of the world, who had their portion in this life. The language also represents him as being fully come to a point, from which he could on no account recede. "As for me—I shall be satisfied." This is like saying, If all the world were against him, or he had been the only one of the same mind, it would not effect his determination; his heart was set on God for his portion, and he could be satisfied with no other.

This may teach us the importance and necessity of being *decided* in religion, and of being wholly guided by its dictates, whatever may be the conduct of others, or their enmity against us. Our own souls are of first importance, our own vineyard must first be kept, and every one must give account of himself to God.

Many are governed by public opinion, they go with the world. Others are guided by their teachers, take every thing for granted, and give up religion if their favourite minister depart. Many are carried away when others fall into error, and turn their backs in a season of apostacy. In opposition to all this, true religion is to go forward, and abide faithful, though all about us were to forsake God, and abandon his righteous cause.

III. The complete enjoyment which he anticipated, in the possession of the desired good: "I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness."

There is a satisfaction in these things, objectively considered, even in the present life. Psal. lxv. 4. The service of God yields so much comfort and satisfaction, that we could never wish to forsake it, though it falls far short of future blessedness.

Two things will then complete our satisfaction; our capacity of enjoyment and the good to be possessed—

1. Our *capacity of enjoyment* will in the future state far exceed what it is at present, and yet it shall be abundantly filled. The hopes and desires of the soul are now greater than all the world can satisfy, as is too evident in the frequent unhappiness and misery of the rich and great, who have no other good; and yet in the present state our powers are very contracted, when compared with what they will be. We know but in part, are now in a state of infancy, and our moral capacity is weakened by the remains of indwelling sin; but when we awake in the image of God, all these impediments will be removed. Our wants of spiritual enjoyment arises also from the want of knowledge, the want of more enlarged and relishing views of heavenly things; but

in the future state the soul will for ever expand, and yet be for ever filled and satisfied from the fountain of all intelligence. Our enjoyments are abridged and interrupted by the innumerable avocations of life, by pain and sickness, by domestic sorrows, and a variety of apprehended ills; but when we awake with the divine likeness, these shall be known no more.

2. The *good to be enjoyed* will be unspeakably greater than has been known before, even what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man. The mystery of God will be finished; and as the finishing of the work of redemption added to the joy of the church, much more will the completion of the whole scheme of providence and grace, by the destruction of the last enemy, fill all heaven with joy and praise. All the comforts of the gospel here are only the foretaste, that will be the fulness; this is only the seed-time, that the harvest. Our conformity to the image of Christ here, though imperfect, is essential to our salvation, and the necessary medium of all spiritual enjoyment; but when this resemblance shall be complete, in body and soul, and every look and lineament become divine; the joy and satisfaction of the believer will also be complete, and God shall be all in all.

CHRISTIAN HUMILITY.

Be clothed with humility.—1 Peter v. 5.

The apostle has placed this exhortation in the midst of several others, as their immediate and primary source; and none of the christian duties can properly be performed without it.

I. Explain the nature of genuine humility.

Humility does not consist in mere words, or in speaking degradingly of ourselves; much less in having false views of our real state and character; but in thinking soberly of ourselves as we ought to think. The greatest and best of men think and speak of themselves with the deepest abasement, saying with the good Centurion, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: and with Paul, Unto me who am less than the least of all saints.

If humility be considered in reference to the objects with which it is conversant, we shall see its nature and effects—

1. *As it relates to God*, it is that state of mind by which we may lie low before him. It is right that every being should occupy his proper place: the proper place for us is in the dust. In all our dealings with God for salvation, it becomes us to seek it as utterly unworthy, and as the gift of mere grace. To come as guilty, without a plea to offer on our behalf, except what arises from the blood of the cross.

It is this spirit that makes the difference between the publican and the the pharisee; the former being deeply abased, while the latter was full self righteous pride. Luke xviii. 13.

2. Christian humility may be seen in its effects *with regard to men.* Pride disposes persons to think themselves of great consequence amongst men, and that the upper seat becomes them; and hence they are ever seeking to be honoured. Too much of this spirit appeared in the disciples of our Lord, in the early part of their profession, and there were strifes amongst them who should be the greatest. But humility will render us meek and lowly in heart, and dispose us to think more highly of others than ourselves. In religious society this spirit is of great importance, and there can be little peace or comfort without it. In civil society also it is held in high estimation, as a virtue above all price.

3. Humility may be considered in reference to *the circumstances in which we are placed.* If rich in the world, humility will make us feel for the poor and the destitute; it will give us pleasure to relieve them, and in a way that shall soften as much as possible a sense of their dependence and obligation, rendering us kind and condescending in our acts of charity. If we are poor and low in the world, humility will make us contented with our station. It is that state of mind which causes every one to know his proper place, whether as masters or servants, parents or children. It will be the same with respect to the various talents we may possess; it will teach us not to overrate them, but to think lowly of ourselves as we ought to think.

II. Consider the importance of this holy principle.

1. It is one of the *greatest ornaments* of the christian character. To be "clothed with humility," is to be beautified with salvation. Psal. cxlix. 4. It is a quality which all admire, both religious and profane; and was one of the principal excellencies in the character of our blessed Lord. Matt. xi. 29.

2. It is most friendly to *growth in grace*, and advancement in true holiness. The Lord resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. The rivers pass by the hills, and run into the valleys. Humility makes room for other graces to grow and thrive; it empties us of self, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. Pride blinds the mind, leaves it in darkness, prevents us from receiving instruction, keeps us back from prayer, and so prevents the growth of repentance, faith, and love.

3. Humility is favourable to *communion with God.* The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and dwells with such as are of a contrite spirit. Psal. xxxiv. 18. Isaiah lxvi. 2. Pride on the contrary can have no fellowship with him.

4. It is *a safe state* to be in, especially in the hour of temptation. He that is lowly need not fear a fall, but he that thinketh he standeth is in the greatest danger. Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. No state is safe to us but that of absolute entire dependence upon God; this engages him on our side, while the self-sufficient are left to their own weakness.

5. It is also *a happy state* for a believer to be in. It fills the mind with peace and holy contentment, relieves us from anxious cares about futurity, and gives rest to the soul. Matt. xi. 29.

6. There is *abundant reason for humility*, and for our being low before God. Every one who looks into his own heart must see sufficient cause for abasement, and confusion of face. If there were no transgression, no inbred corruption to deplore, yet are we at best but unprofitable servants.

Let these considerations reconcile us to all the afflictions and trials of life; all are little enough to humble us in the dust, and to keep us there. What we should be without such discipline, who can tell! Job xxxiii. 16. Isaiah xxxviii. 16.

DOCTRINE OF FUTURE BLESSEDNESS OUR GREAT SUPPORT IN LIFE AND IN DEATH.

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.—2 Corinthians v. 1.

The certainty of death is what no one doubts, and some idea of a hereafter is entertained by men of all ages and nations, almost without exception, nor can they easily divest themselves of this impression. But as to what that hereafter is, and whether it is to be considered as an object of desire or of dread, the gospel only can declare. There is no religion on earth besides that could give us any information on this awful subject, and but for the gospel we must have lived and died in a state of utter uncertainty.

Life and immortality are now brought to light, and the text contains the language of holy triumph, amidst all the sorrows of the world, and even in the prospect of death itself.

I. Notice the different expressions which the apostle here uses on the subject of death and futurity.

1. Paul speaks as an apostle and a minister in behalf of *himself and his brethren.* They were exposed to death in every form, and stood in jeopardy every hour, being always delivered to death for Christ's sake. And now this was their hope, that if compelled to quit this tabernacle, they had another dwelling provided. But though spoken of the apostles and suffering christians in that day, the text is equally applicable to all other christians, in every succeeding age of the world; for they all have one hope, and one home, ch. iv. 14.

2. The human body is here presented under *a threefold description,* and every term is highly expressive. (1) It is a "house," the habitation of the soul, its dwelling-place is the present world. Solomon

also speaks of it as a house, and when old age and death come, he describes the doors as being shut, and the windows as being darkened. Eccles. xii. 3. (2) It is an "earthly" house, a frail tenement, whose foundation is in the dust. It is mean when compared with the dwelling above, and will stand only for a little time. (3) It is also called a "tabernacle," a temporary and moveable habitation, like what the patriarchs dwelt in, when they sojourned from place to place. Here we have no continuing city: we are tenants at will, and shall soon be turned out.

3. It is supposed that this body should shortly be *dissolved*, and reduced to its original dust. However strong and robust, however beautiful and well fed, however near and dear to us by the ties of blood and affection, the body must be dissolved, and the tabernacle taken down. Those countenances which have beamed upon us with so much brightness, and diffused life amongst our friends, must all be changed and see corruption. Talents and usefulness, and those who have been the greatest blessing to the church and to the world, must all be buried in the dust. Paul had preached the gospel, from Jerusalem round about to Illyricum; yet his lips must be sealed in silence, and his voice be heard no more.

4. When the body is dissolved by death, *those who have believed in Jesus shall have a home to go to.* If taken out of one house, another shall be provided for them. It was this thought that enabled Paul to speak with so much confidence and composure in the views of Death. "If it were dissolved"—ah and let it be dissolved, and let death do his worst—still we have a house, eternal in the heavens. Here the terms used are in contrast with the former, and are very expressive. The future state is here called "a building," and a building "of God;" but the body was compared to a clay tenement that might easily be destroyed. Heaven is a substantial residence, which the Lord himself hath built, and not man. It is a house "not made with hands," for what is so made may easily be destroyed; but the future state of blessedness is a kingdom that fadeth not away, "eternal in the heavens."

5. It appears from the text that the *knowledge of a future state* is attainable in the present life. "We know," says Paul. Of ourselves indeed we know nothing about it, either by reason or by intuition: it is by faith only that we know it, ver. 7. Yet thereby we may be said to know it, because the testimony of God is the most certain of all evidence.

II. The doctrine of a future state of blessedness is the christian's best support under the trials of life, and in the prospect of death.

The apostle intimates that had it not been for this, he and others must have fainted under their trials: ch. iv. 1, 17, 18.

1. Consider the *suitableness of such a prospect* to sustain us under the ills of life, and in death. A large portion of God's people are poor in this world, and have to contend with many hardships: and what is so alleviating as to think of the inheritance that is reserved, and the hope laid up for them in heaven? They will be rich enough by and bye, if they can but wait for it. What so reviving to those who see the

emptiness of the world, though they be not poor? To have there an enduring substance, and a crown of righteousness that fadeth not away. What so supporting under the decays of nature, when flesh and heart begin to fail, and the outward man is perishing? It is only by looking at the things that are not seen, that the inward man is renewed day by day. What could cheer the heart like this, in the prospect of death itself? There is something in death at which our nature revolts; and no one could be willing to die, except from the hope of escaping a greater evil, or enjoying a greater good: ver. 2.

2. Compare these supports with *those that are derived from other quarters.* The ancient heathen looked for a state of earthly bliss after this life, the deluded Mahomedans are looking for a sensual paradise, and infidels for annihilation. Nominal christians are looking for heaven too, but their hope has no foundation. Even the law of God, though it virtually contained a promise of eternal life, yet not to transgressors. It is the gospel only that brings life and immortality to light, and imparts a hope that maketh not ashamed.

3. Consider *the effects which this hope and these prospects have actually produced.* What resignation amidst the greatest afflictions, as in the case of Job, when he could say, I know that my Redeemer liveth. What peace amidst the distresses of poverty, and the loss of all created good, as in the case of Judah's captivity: The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him. What weanedness from the world, as in the instance of David, who could say, I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness. What joy in tribulation, and what triumph in the prospect of death, as in the example of Paul and the rest of the apostles, and also in the holy martyrs.

STATE OF ADVERSITY FAVOURABLE TO COMMUNION WITH GOD.

I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought.— Hosea xiii. 5.

When Israel was few in number, poor and low, it was well with them; but when God brought them out of Egypt into the good land, their heart was exalted, and they soon forgot the Lord: ver. 6. In this, as well as in other parts of their history, they present us with too faithful a picture of human nature.

The truth taught us in the text is, That the seasons of adversity are most favourable to communion with God.

I. Endeavour to establish and illustrate this interesting truth.

It is not to be understood, that a state of continued adversity is desi-

rable, for it has its temptations, as well as uninterrupted prosperity. Yet that a portion of adversity in our lot is needful; and when compared with affluence and ease, it is friendly to true religion.

Nor is it meant that adversity will of itself work for our good. Through the corruption of our hearts it may operate against us, as it did with many of the Israelites who perished in the wilderness, and with many others who are exercised with affliction.

But generally speaking, if we review our own past experience, and compare our times of trial with those of ease and fulness, we shall find that the former, rather than the latter, have been best for us.

1. Enquire what have been the seasons in which we have enjoyed *most of a spirit of prayer*, and found the greatest freedom and pleasure in it. In the day of trouble we are especially invited to call upon God, that he may deliver us; and can we not look back to those times, as witnesses of our fervency and importunity? It was thus with our blessed Lord himself, Heb. v. 7. Luke xxii. 44: and thus with all his saints. 2 Cor. xii. 8.

2. When have we possessed most of *a spirit of humility, and brokenness of heart?* Have we not found more of this, when labouring under some great distress, than at other times? When Ephraim spake trembling he exalted himself, but when he offended in Baal he died. Hos. xiii. 1. When we can weep for sin, and mourn after the Lord, then it is that he condescends to commune with us, and dwell with us. Isai. lxvi. 2.

3. When have we found *our hearts most weaned from the world*, or enjoyed a greater degree of spirituality? Has it not been when depressed by adversity, and when earthly comforts have fled from us? We have then found our treasure to be in heaven, and our hearts have been there also. In proportion as men are gaining the world, the world generally gains them; and those who have the least of the world, have the least care about it. Many have been kind and liberal when they have had but little, and miserably selfish when they have had much. Psal. lxii. 10.

4. In what seasons have we found *the truth and promises of the gospel most precious to us*, or tasted most that the Lord is gracious? Has it not been in times of deep distress, when overwhelmed with a sense of guilt and unworthiness; and have not these been some of the best seasons for communion with God? And may he not say of us as of Israel, I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought.

5. Being pressed with trials, have we not been *more watchful against sin*, than in seasons when we have been at ease? Adversity makes the heart tender, and keeps conscience alive; but prosperity often takes us off the watch. David appeared more watchful and spiritual while a shepherd, and when persecuted by Saul, than he did afterwards upon the throne. The Lord knew him in the wilderness, and had much communion with him there.

6. In adversity we feel a *more entire dependence upon God;* but when out of trouble we are in danger of self-sufficiency, and self-confidence. A state of adversity furnishes an occasion for the exercise of mercy, and leads us both to seek and to enjoy it. Then it is that we

can glory in infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon us. Many promises are made to the poor and the afflicted, and then it is we taste their sweetness.

II. The use of reflecting on these seasons that are past.

It is intimated in the text that God remembers them, and it becomes us to do so too.

1. It affords *a motive for gratitude* and thankfulness, to those who have been in adversity and supported under it. The Lord fed Israel with manna from heaven, and water from the rock, while passing through the desert; and have not some of our greatest trials been accompanied with the greatest mercies, and been to us the richest seasons of enjoyment? David learned more in the wilderness than out of it, and so do we.

2. Reflection on the past may *reconcile us to adversity*, and comfort us in all our tribulations. If we enjoy more of God in the land of drought, it is better than living without God in the land of plenty. If the Lord had not seen that a low state would generally be best, he would not have appointed it as the portion of so many of his people.

3. It teaches *a lesson of humility* to those who are in prosperity, because of the danger there is of forgetting their best friend, and of departing from the living God. It is common for men to say of others who have prospered in the world, and then dropped their acquaintance, 'I knew them when they were in other circumstances, but now they have forgotten me.' But it is the worst of all to forget God.

TRUE BELIEVERS DISTINGUISHED FROM APOSTATES.

If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.—Hebrews x. 38, 39.

The whole tenor of this epistle is very different from all the rest. The other epistles are addressed to particular churches, or to individuals: this appears to be written to the churches generally in Judea, which consisted chiefly of Jewish converts. The others embrace a great variety of subjects, adapted also to the peculiar circumstances of the times; but this is chiefly confined to one subject. It enters into a comparison between Judaism and christianity, with a view to exhibit the great superiority of he latter above the former, and for confirming the Hebrews in the truth.

These Jewish converts had met with many troubles, since they embraced the gospel, and were called to endure a great fight of afflictions. Many false teachers also got in among them, and endeavoured to sub-

vert the gospel of Christ. Hence it is that Paul enters into an argumentative defence of christianity, and insists that it is the consummation of the former economy. Owing however to the opposition these Hebrews met with from the world, and owing to the seduction of false teachers, many of them had turned their backs upon the gospel; and this occasioned the awful warning given in the text. The declension among them, though considerable, was not total: many of them still continued faithfully attached to the gospel.

I. Offer a few explanatory remarks upon the text.

1. Observe, there is such a thing as *beginning in religion, and then going back;* 'beginning in the spirit, and ending in the flesh.' Some affecting instances of this kind appeared among the immediate followers of our Lord. John vi. 66. Among the Galatians also, and among the Hebrews, there were many who turned back. Gal. iii. 1—4. Heb. vi. 4—6. But Paul hoped well of many of them, notwithstanding this; and hence it is that so many warnings and cautions are given. Heb. vi. 9.

2. The portion of such as apostatise is *final perdition.* This is expressed in a variety of phrases: 'It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to turn from the holy commandment: It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance: My soul shall have no pleasure in them, saith the Lord.' Ah, how awful is such a state: they will meet with double destruction, and their last state is worse than the first.

3. All who truly believe in Christ, *believe to the saving of the soul,* and thus receive the end of their faith. True believing is one of those things which 'accompany salvation.' Though mere light and knowledge, conviction and fear, may die away and cease, yet God has established a connection between faith and salvation. John iii. 36.

4. Though such as do believe may suffer a partial declension, yet *they shall not draw back unto perdition.* There are seasons in the christian life when faith, hope, and love may be on the decline; and owing to inward conflicts and outward difficulties, the believer may sometimes be left to sink low and become feeble; but the Lord has promised to be as the dew unto Israel, and they shall revive as the corn, grow as the vine, and cast forth their roots as Lebanon. Hos. xiv. 5—7.

II. Endeavour to distinguish between those who draw back to perdition, and those who believe to the saving of the soul.

It is of the utmost importance for us to know our real state, and the class to which we belong; and to this end it is necessary to have some insight into human nature, and especially an intimate acquaintance with our own hearts.

The final issue of our christian profession is a serious concern. When a person sets out in the ways of God, we cannot tell what will be the result; whether he will continue to the end, or draw back unto

perdition. On this account we must often feel, not only for one another, but each one for himself.

There are however some things by which saving faith may be known; and in general, *the final issue of our religious profession will depend upon, and be determined by, the principles in which it originates; or whether we come in by the door of the sheepfold, or climb up some other way.*

1. Then, those who walk in the ways of religion *merely through custom, or from the mere principles of education*, will be likely in a time of trial to draw back; while those who really believe, will keep on in spite of all opposition. No doubt there are many who would never have thought of being christians, if they had not been brought up under some sort of profession. But if this be the origin of our religion; if we attend upon the gospel, and profess to receive its doctrines because our fathers did so before us, it is nothing worth. Those who act on this persuasion, having no principles of their own, will never stand in the day of trial, much less will they be saved at last. They may go on till overtaken by some temptation, or beset with some difficulty, and then they will give up religion as a thing of which they are grown tired. If danger comes they will flee before it, and cannot endure cruel mockings, or persecution for Christ's sake. Such will sometimes go on in religion till they conceive themselves slighted or offended, and then they turn their backs and mingle with the world.

Not so the true believer. Afflictions and persecutions for Christ's sake give him no offence; whether honoured or despised, he will still seek the honour that cometh from God only. Tribulations will endear the Saviour to him so much the more, and so much the more will he feel his need of him. Amidst all his sufferings he will be ready to say with Paul, None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself. If allured by worldly temptations, the believer will overcome by the blood of the Lamb; or if he suffer a defeat, he will return like Peter to the contest with great ardour, and shall overcome at last.

2. Those who enter on a profession of religion because it happens to be *the custom of the times, or of the place in which they live*, will be likely to relinquish their attachment, where opposite principles prevail. Christianity was the prevailing religion in the apostles' time, and was commonly professed in the land of Judea. In Jerusalem especially there was a great multitude of christians, who for a time at least were held in public estimation, 'continuing daily in the temple, and having favour with all the people.' Hence Ananias and Sapphira were willing to join the party, and even to sacrifice some of their property for that purpose. So also when the gospel prevailed in the city of Samaria, Simon Magus himself wished to be baptized. But a profession of religion that is merely influenced by example, will not stand in a time of danger and reproach; all such professors will draw back to perdition, for their hearts are not right in the sight of God.

It is far otherwise with true believers. They are like Elijah, who when all had bowed the knee to Baal, would stand alone for God. The pious Jews in their captivity could not forget Jerusalem, though the heathen around them had forgotten it, and long since rased it to its founda-

tion. Neither can the christian forget his Saviour, who lives continually in his heart by faith. The believing Hebrews had withstood a great fight of afflictions, and Paul hoped they would still endure.

3. Such as have *never been convinced of the great evil of sin, and of the utter insufficiency of all worldly good*, will be in danger of going back again to the world. Like Demas, if an opportunity offers of getting wealth, they will give up the advantages of religion. Or like the Israelites, they will be longing after the fleshpots of Egypt, when they get into the wilderness. Lot's wife is also a sample of this sort of professors, in looking back, and lingering after Sodom.

But it is not so with real christians, who have seen the evil of sin, and the vanity of all created good. Their attachment to the gospel may subject them to worldly losses, to poverty and contempt; but they cannot on that account forsake the Lord. Like Ruth they will feel that they must go on, and cast in their lot with the people of God, let that lot be what it may. Having known so much of the bitterness of sin, they cannot now do without a Saviour, and a great one; and are constrained to say with Peter, To whom, Lord, should we go: thou hast the words of eternal life.

4. Such as enter upon the ways of God from *sudden and violent alarms of conscience*, and not from a proper conviction of the judgment, or from real love, are in danger of apostacy. They will go back again when the alarm is over, or sink into carnal security when they have got the better of their fears. Many have been under strong conviction, and while in that state have been diligent in seeking the Lord, as a means of pacifying conscience; and when conscience is made easy, they will either turn to open sins, or gradually decline in their attachment to the gospel.

But it is not so with those who believe to the saving of the soul. They feel an abiding sense of danger, and cannot relinquish their hold of Christ; neither can they be persuaded to leave the ark till the waters of the flood are abated, and they are safely landed in glory.

5. Those who *make religion to consist in joy or grief at first conversion*, are in danger of being deceived, and so of drawing back to perdition. True religion is not a transient feeling, nor is repentance the work of a day, but of a whole life. The work of faith, the labour of love, and the patience of hope, will all become habitual, wherever they have commenced under the influence of renewing grace. The life which I now live in the flesh, says the apostle, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. True faith is a principle that will never cease to operate, till it has completed all the work of saving the soul.

How necessary then to examine well our motives in all we do in religion, to see that our profession originates in principle, and that our hearts are right in the sight of God.

Such as have made no direct profession of the gospel ought to be reminded, that a state of neutrality is utterly impossible, and that affected indifference will be construed into direct and positive enmity. Luke xi. 33.

PRIVILEGES OF A CHRISTIAN COUNTRY.

In Judah is God known, his name is great in Israel. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling-place in Zion.—Psalm lxxvi. 1, 2.

This psalm does not appear to have been written by David, but in later times. Its contents seem to intimate that it was written on the overthrow of Sennacherib's army, probably by Hezekiah or Isaiah, and committed to the sons of Asaph to be sung in the temple worship.

I. Offer a few general remarks on the text.

1. The great *honour and happiness* of Israel consisted in having Jehovah for their God, as it was from the beginning. Deut. xxxiii. 26—29. Here they stood upon high ground in comparison of the world around them. Many other nations were superior to them in wealth and greatness, like the high hills of Bashan that looked down upon Zion with contempt; many also excelled them in science, as Greece and Rome. But Zion was holy ground, the dwelling-place of the Most High. Deut. xxvi. 19.

2. Observe the *distribution of the honour.* All Israel had a share, but Judah especially, and Zion most of all; for accordingly as God was near to them, such was their glory. Zion therefore was the glory of Israel, and the church of God is the glory of any nation, and her glory is that God is there. Psalm cxlviii. 14.

3. The favourable regard to Israel is worthy of notice, on account of *the time referred to.* For the last three hundred years God's name had not been great in Israel, for it was dishonoured by the prevalence of idolatry: and only a little while before this period, Israel was carried away captive by the Assyrians, and a remnant only was left. Hezekiah felt much for these, and included them in the pale of the church. Chron. xxx. 5, 6.

4. That which was then confined to *Israel and Judah*, has since been extended to a considerable part of the heathen world. This was promised, to grace the reign of the Messiah, who was to be God's salvation to the ends of the earth. The seed of Abraham are chosen and reserved for the same purpose, and their conversion is to be the life of the world. At present we may gratefully apply the language of the text to ourselves: In Britian God is known, his name is great in England. In our towns and cities is his tabernacle, and his dwelling-place is in his church.

5. The scene of operation is enlarged, so also is *the medium of knowledge.* God was then known as the God of Abraham, as the Lord God of Israel; and as such he was a refuge for them. But now he is known as the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in him. He is now a refuge for us, even for the chief of sinners.

II. Consider the great advantage in living in an age and country where God is known.

1. Compare *our advantages with those who live in heathen lands*, in reference to happiness even in the present life. There are many miseries peculiar to heathens; and among these the offering up of human sacrifices. Psal. xvi. 4. Or suppose the advantages were equal as to the present life, yet misery in a greater or less degree is the common lot of man, and the difference is still extreme; the one has a God to flee to, the other none. Famine, pestilence, and war have been where God's name is known; but here there is a covert from the storm. But how appalling to behold multitudes dying without succour, and without hope! Besides these public calamities, there is a great variety of domestic trials; but under all we have a place of refuge, and the everlasting arms are underneath.

2. Compare our state with theirs, *in reference to the world to come.* Men of all nations, ages, and classes know that they are sinners, and must die. The Philippian jailor felt this. But where is there a refuge from the wrath to come; and who could have answered his question? It is here only, in a christian land, that the pardon of sin is revealed. All besides is darkness, and men must die without hope, or with one that will deceive. They may flee to their superstitions, but it will not avail them. Believers in Christ only are assured of a blessed immortality. 2 Cor. v. 1.

3. Observe the terms in which *the grace and condescension of God* are expressed. "He is known, his tabernacle is with us, and he dwells in Zion." This was the great privilege of Israel, and they alone could say, 'Is not the Lord in Zion; is not her King in her?' This now is true of all the churches of the saints, to whom he has given gifts, that the Lord God might dwell among them. Psal. lxviii. 18.

III. Improve the subject.

1. Though these are great advantages, they will not avail us without *personal religion.* What if God should be known in this country, still the great question is, do *we* know him? Some may have to say, Truly God was known in my native land, in my town and neighbourhood; but I lived and died a heathen, a Sabbath breaker, and refused to harken to his word. He was known to my forefathers in my family, and in the congregation where I attended; but I took no heed and my attendance was all in vain. I had the form of godliness, but not the power.
What if he dwells in Zion, and his tabernacle be with us, and yet he has no dwelling in our hearts? To be in such a nation, such a town or place, and yet to be without God, is to be in the condition of Chorazin and Bethsaida, exposed to tenfold condemnation. Matt. xi. 21, 22.

2. Where God makes *his dwelling-place*, let it be our concern to make it ours, and to seek it as the first of all our privileges. Psalm xxvii. 4. cxxxii. 6, 7.

3. If we duly appreciate our advantages, we shall be concerned to

extend them to others, and to diffuse the light all around us. There can be no temptation to keep our religious privileges to ourselves; they increase in value in proportion as they are communicated. Psal. lxvii. 1, 2.

THE DIFFICULTY OF BEING SAVED.

Strive to enter in at the straight gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.—Luke xiii. 24.

Our Lord rendered himself familiar with those to whom he preached, and both permitted and encouraged them to ask him questions. The text is an answer to one who proposed an unwise question, relating not to his own salvation, but the salvation of others. Christ did not gratify his curiosity, but directed his attention to what properly concerned himself.

By the "straight gate" is not meant the gate of entrance into the kingdom of God on earth, but to the kingdom of glory. None seek to enter into the former, and are not able; but many shall seek to enter into the latter, and shall not be able: ver. 25—28.

The "striving," to which we are exhorted, expresses not merely the exercises of mind at first conversion, but throughout the whole life. We must strive and agonize continually, that we may enter into the kingdom at last.

I. Explain the counsel given us by our Lord.

If ever we obtain eternal life, we must not trifle with the concerns of our souls, but be in real earnest. The way to heaven is a race, and we must not loiter; it is a warfare, and we must not beat the air.

This "striving" comprises at least two things—striving with God in prayer, and striving against sin, which would impede our progress towards heaven.

More particularly—

1. *A sense of our sinful and lost condition* is necessary to our striving with success. Without this no one will be in earnest, but will trifle with religion. We may pray, but unless we have a deep sense of our guilt and unworthiness, it will be mere formality. But if our lost condition be duly realised, it will teach us to pray like the publican, God be merciful to me a sinner. It will cause us to wrestle like Jacob, to plead like Ruth, and like the woman of Canaan to take no denial. Matt. xv. 25—28.

2. A conviction of *our utter helplessness, and exposedness to the just displeasure of God*, is implied in our striving to enter into the kingdom. No man will ever be in earnest without this, and hence it is that multitudes never seek the Lord at all. They see nothing of their danger, nothing of their helplessness and misery, nothing of the wrath

of God, and how much that wrath is deserved. But if all this is perceived and deeply felt, it will make us like one who is sueing for his life, knowing that his eternal all is at stake.

3. An apprehension of *the inestimable worth of the heavenly prize*, of an interest in Christ and the promises of eternal life, is implied in our striving to enter in at the straight gate. It was thus with Paul, who counted all things but loss, that he might win Christ, and be found in him. Phil. iii. 8—14. It is this that will enable us to bear every loss, and encounter every difficulty. For this the blessed martyrs strove, and resisted even unto blood. For this we also shall be willing to deny ourselves, take up the cross, and follow Christ, if we may but enter into the kingdom at last.

II. The motives by which this counsel is enforced.

These are chiefly derived from the consideration of the awful condition of those who will be finally lost, or who " will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

1. Their *character* is described as being strangers to God, and workers of iniquity. ver. 27. They made a profession of the gospel, but had no close dealing with God, nor close walking with him. They were known to the ministers of the gospel, and to christian friends, but were unknown to Christ. They were all the while strangers to true religion, and under the dominion of sin. This then is a reason for us to be in earnest, that we may avoid their condemnation.

2. The *self-deception* they were under, is strongly marked. They had high expectations, and anticipated an abundant entrance into the kingdom of God. And why were they so confident? (1) On account of their *relation* to the godly. In the same manner the Jews boasted of having Abraham for their father, and many now depend on their christian parentage. (2) On account of the *means of grace* which they enjoyed: " thou hast taught in our streets," ver. 26. Thus many value themselves, by comparing themselves with infidels. (3) They were also admitted to *christian ordinances.* " We have eaten and drunk in thy presence." Thus many are acknowledged as christians, who will not be owned at the last day.

3. The *awful disappointment* they will meet with, seeking to enter in, but shall not be able. Their hope shall be turned into despair, and instead of being admitted, they shall be " thrust out," ver. 28. The door will be shut, and all their importunity be in vain, ver. 25.

4. Their *aggravated doom*, which will be heightened at least by two considerations. The admission of their *fathers*, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, on whom their expectations were founded, ver. 28: and the admission of the *gentiles*, whom they had despised, ver. 29, 30.

Let us therefore agonize to enter in, and tremble at the doom of these self-deceivers.

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP.

But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.—1 John i. 7.

The apostle had just been inviting others to fellowship with himself and his brethren, urging as a motive that their fellowship was with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ; and in the text he shows what is necessary to such fellowship. If we walk in darkness, there is no truth in us; but if in the light, we have fellowship one with another. He does not say, fellowship with God, for that is implied in our walking in the light; and that is it which fits us for communion with his people.

I. Enquire what is intended by "walking in the light."

The word "light" is sometimes put for joy, but here it means purity. In general it relates to the light of truth, and denotes such a walk as corresponds with it.

1. It is to walk so as to make *the glory of God* our chief end, with a pure intention to serve and please him, having a single eye to his glory in all things. Matt. vi. 22.

2. It is to make *the divine character* our model, to walk in the light "as he is in the light." To walk in love, for God is love; to walk in peace with all men, that the God of peace may be with us. It is to imitate God in his goodness and tender mercy. Matt. v. 44, 45. Ephes. v. 1, 2.

3. It is to make *the will of God* the rule of our conduct, to take all our direction from thence, how we are to serve and please him, and not to be guided by tradition, or our own inclinations.

4. It is to walk *worthy of the Lord*, unto all well-pleasing; to be influenced by the principles of the gospel, and to have our general conduct agreeing therewith. It is coming to the light, that our deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God. John iii. 21.

II. Consider the blessings connected with this line of conduct.

1. *Communion with God*, which is evidently included. If we walk in the light, we are of one mind with God, and shall therefore walk with him, and he with us. If engaged in his service, he will work with us and by us; and our work being wrought in God, shall be approved in his sight. If called to suffer for him, he will give us strength equal to the day. He will also grant us liberty of access, and freedom to plead before him. Ephes. iii. 12.

2. If we walk in the light, we shall have *fellowship one with another*. This is not to be enjoyed without nearness to God, for that alone is the life of christian fellowship. There is no oneness of heart without it, nor love for the truths sake which dwelleth in us. But if we

walk in the light, it will not only remove those things which stand in the way of christian communion, but will naturally lead to it, and we shall learn to love as brethren. There may be much civility and good-will towards one another, where there is no communion with God; but christian affection cannot exist without it. If we decline in spirituality, we shall soon be as far off from God's people as we are from God himself.

3. Another blessed privilege is, we shall be *interested in the atonement*, and "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." This is an unspeakable advantage; but at the same time it implies—(1) That even those who walk in the light have *need of forgiveness* and cleansing grace, as well as others, and that it is in vain to pretend to be without sin.—(2) That the only way of forgiveness is *through the blood of Christ*, the efficacy of which is sufficient to cleanse from "all sin."—(3) That which gives efficacy to Christ's sacrifice is the *dignity of his person*, as "the Son of God."—(4) Only those who truly walk in the light, and *obey the gospel*, can have an interest in the atonement, and shall not come into condemnation. They only have an advocate with the Father, and come to the blood of sprinkling. 1 John ii. 1.

We learn from hence the necessity of personal religion, and of the renewal and sanctification of our hearts. Without this we can have no communion with God or with his people, no forgiveness, and no hope of eternal life.

If any are going on still in darkness, in error and in sin, and yet flatter themselves that all will be well at last, let them beware of so dreadful a delusion. For 'if we say that we have fellowship with God, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth,' ver. 6.

THE BARREN FIG-TREE.

Now in the morning, as he returned into the city he hungered. And when he saw a fig-tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig-tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig-tree withered away.—Matthew xxi. 18—20.

After the labours of the day, in the city and in the temple, it was usual with our blessed Lord to retire for the night into some of the neighbouring villages. Returning in the morning, it is said he hungered, and sought fruit from a fig-tree; and finding none, it withered at his rebuke.

I. Consider the miraculous fact, as it is here related.

Some objections have been made to our Lord's conduct on this occa-

sion, especially as it is said by another evangelist, that 'the time of figs was not yet.' Mark xi. 12—14.

But to this it may be answered, (1) That 'the time of figs' means here, the time of *gathering* them, and which therefore was after the time of bearing fruit. Of course the tree was barren, producing 'nothing but leaves.' (2) The reason why Christ cursed the tree was not merely on account of its barrenness, but for the *disappointment* it produced by its promising appearance; for he 'came to it afar off, if haply he might find any thing thereon.'

That the fig-tree was really barren, is evident from two considerations: (1) Because figs appear, if there be any, *before* the leaves. Cant. ii. 13. A tree therefore covered with leaves would have had fruit, if not entirely barren, especially as the gathering season had scarcely commenced. (2) The *time of year* was near the passover, when their corn was in full ear, and their fruit began to ripen. If the tree therefore had not been barren and worthless, it would at that season have produced fruit.

But why was our Lord displeased, let the tree be what it will. Not on account of the tree, certainly; but to give an awful lesson to those who resembled it in its barrenness, and who would meet with a similar doom. Let us therefore,

II. View the fig-tree as an emblem of the Jewish nation.

Much the same figure of speech is employed in Luke xiii. 6—9, and in Matt. xxi. 33—43.

1. There was much of the *profession of religion* among the Jews, but it was mere profession. They pretended to love God, but the love of God was not in them. They paid great attention to forms and ceremonies, but neglected the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. Matt. xxiii. 23—28.

2. Christ's coming into the world, and to his own nation, was like *his coming to the fig-tree.* He came into his vineyard, and to the men of Judah his pleasant plant; and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry. Isai. v. 7. God said, Surely they will reverence my Son; but they said, This is the heir, come let us kill him. Matt. xxi. 37, 38.

3. *The curse that fell upon them* was like that upon the fig-tree. The Jewish nation withered and died away, and was cut down root and branch. The fig-tree was not suffered in future to bear leaves, of which it had exhibited such profusion; so neither were the Jews permitted to bear even the form of religion, but their temple and their altar were utterly destroyed, and they have ceased to be a nation and a people.

III. The text is applicable to individuals of every age and country.

1. The *character* denoted by the fig-tree is *unprofitable*, the cumberer of the ground; persons who profess religion, but bring forth no fruit to Christ; especially those who rise high in profession, and yet have nothing but a name to live. They know much, but have no love;

are full of religious affection, but it is all self-love. They are zealous enough for outward forms and circumstances, but have no love to the gospel; have much devotion, but no true benevolence.

2. The *curse of Christ* will fall on such characters, and they shall be burnt up as chaff. Matt. xiii. 40—42. The curse of God as the Lawgiver stands against us as sinners, but the curse of the Saviour is still more dreadful, because from that there is no deliverance, and there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin. John iii. 18, 36. This is the curse that is denounced against formalists and hypocrites, so offensive in the sight of God, and so odious to men. Matt. xxiii. 25, 33. The axe is laid to the root of the tree, and it is hewn down and cast into the fire. Matt. iii. 10, 12.

Let those whose consciences answer to the question of being barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, beware of the dreadful consequences; and let them give all diligence to make their calling and election sure. 2 Pet. i. 10.

THE MORTIFICATION OF SIN.

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.—Romans viii. 13.

The apostle, though writing to believers, found it necessary to use the most searching language, and to warn them of the consequences of sin. Our Lord in similar terms told his disciples, that unless they exercised the severest self-denial they could not enter into the kingdom of God. Matt. v. 29, 30.

The two-fold description in the text points out to us the way of death, and the way of life.

I. The description given as the way of death; it is to "live after the flesh."

The term "flesh" is put for the corruption of our nature, or for human nature as corrupt; so when men had corrupted their way they are called "flesh." Gen. vi. 3. It is the same as being carnal in opposition to what is spiritual; and this is supposed to be the character of man. The term carnal is sometimes partially applied to christians, as in 1 Cor. iii. 3: but where carnality totally prevails, it leads to death. Rom. viii. 6.

"Living after the flesh," is the same thing as following its dictates; fulfilling the desire of the flesh and of the mind, and walking according to the course of this world.

There are many ways in which men may be said to live after the flesh, some of which are the following—

1. We may live in *the indulgence of fleshly lusts*, and this is what

the world in general seek after. We all have our pleasures: and the great question is, what are they? Vain amusements, vain company, eating, drinking, chambering, and wontonness. Are these your element? Or if restrained by motives of decency, do your hearts still long after them, and regret that religion imposes a restraint? If so, you are living after the flesh, whatever be your pretensions to the contrary.

2. We may be preserved from these grosser evils, and yet be under the dominion of *fleshly wisdom.* This consists in worldly and selfish policy, making every thing bend to our secular interest, and going so far in religion as is consistent with that interest, and no farther. But this is living after the flesh, and leads to eternal death.

3. We may neither be sensual nor avaricious, but have a thirst for *mental improvement;* and yet it may only be the wisdom of the flesh, which is foolishness with God. 1 Cor. iii. 18—20. Its principles are worldly, and its aim is to shine before men. This also is to live after the flesh, or according to the dictates of a carnal mind.

4. Our religion may only be the work of the flesh, the offspring of corrupted reason. Heresies are so denominated, because they consist of doctrines that originate in a depraved heart, and are gratifying to human pride. Gal. v. 19, 20. Those who corrupted the gospel with their vain philosophy, were professed christians; yet they were puffed up by a fleshly mind. Col. ii. 18. This, all this leads to death, eternal death.

II. The way of life: "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body."—

Sins are here called "the deeds of the body," and require to be "mortified." The way in which this is to be effected, is "through the Spirit."

1. Sins are called *the deeds of the body;* not the deeds done in the body, for in this sense all actions are performed; but those sinful deeds of which the body is the immediate agent, are principally intended. Col. iii. 5. It is the flesh that lusteth against the Spirit, and that wars against the soul. Gal. v. 17. 1 Pet. ii. 11. Yet not the flesh simply considered, but the corruption of our nature, which is called the body of sin and death. Rom. vii. 24.

2. These deeds of the body are to be *mortified.* The word here is strong; it means to kill or put to death, but it is not too strong to agree with the fact. It is expressive of what must be the aim in this conflict. The object of sin in all its operations is the ruin and destruction of the soul, and the aim of the believer must be the utter destruction of sin. There is so much danger of self-deception however, in reference to this conflict, that it is highly necessary for us to examine our principles and motives. Some will leave their sins behind them, while they go up to worship, or on other occasions; others feel remorse, and determine to oppose sin, when they are heavily afflicted, and are made to taste some of its bitterness. Psal. lxxviii. 34. But in all this there is no deadly enmity, no real mortification; the sinner is soon at peace again with his sins. If any thing be done to purpose, there must

be no truce, no intermission of the warfare. All the means employed against sin, must be with a view to kill and destroy; the poisonous weed must not only be cut off, but rooted out.

3. This mortification is to be effected *through the Spirit.* This supposes our believing in Christ, and that we both receive and depend upon divine influence. All self-righteous attemps to mortify sin will come to nothing. We may fast and pray, retire from the world, and afflict our souls; but every effort must be made in the strength of the Lord God, or it will utterly fail.

The influence of the Holy Spirit in this work consists,

(1) In *leading us to Christ*, in whose death we find the strongest motives for the death of sin. By his cross it is that we are crucified to the world, and the world to us. Our first coming to Christ gives sin its death blow, as may be seen in the case of Zaccheus; and it is by union and nearness to him, that the work is carried on.

(2) In *helping our praying infirmities.* Prayer is one of the principal means of mortifying sin, as it brings us more immediately into the presence of God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, nor can it live in his sight.

(3) In acting *as the Comforter*, sin is mortified through the Spirit. All true consolation in the gospel tends directly to wean us from the world and sin, and by this test all our hopes and comforts may be tried.

The end of this path is eternal life, as promised in the text. And to him that overcometh, Christ will give to eat of the tree of life, and he shall inherit all things. Rev. ii. 7, 17. xxi. 7.

CONVERSION OF THE GENTILES.

Simon hath declared how God at the first did visit the gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.—Acts xv. 14.

It was a long time before the Jews, and even the disciples of our Lord, could be induced to believe that God would call the gentiles by his grace. They had hitherto had no part in Israel, and they seemed to think that they never would. But in this chapter we have an account of the Lord's mercy towards them, and of their conversion by the gospel: and when this event had taken place, the apostles soon found that it was according to ancient prophecy. They had lain for ages and ages past in sin and darkness, and now they are visited with light and truth.

I. Notice the terms by which their conversion is expressed.

1. In general it is expressed by *the Lord's visiting the gentiles.* This includes several interesting particulars—

(1) It implies that in every thing relating to our salvation, *God is the first mover;* he "at the first" did visit the gentiles. But for this,

they would never have sought him, would never have thought of enquiring after God their maker. Or if any among them were uneasy without God, they could never have found him: all their thoughts and enquiries on this subject is called a 'feeling after him.' Ch. xvii. 27. The world had had sufficient proof, that with all their wisdom they knew not God. 1 Cor. i. 21.

2. God visited the gentiles *by sending missionaries*, who conveyed to them the gospel. Some of these they slew, and many of them they persecuted; yet it was in this way that the seeds of truth were sown in all the nations of the earth. Thus also he visits us, by sending his ministers from time to time, and setting up his tabernacle in our towns and villages.

(3) He visited them *in a way of providence*, both by judgments and by mercies. He left not himself without witness, giving them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness. But the goodness of God did not lead them to repentance, nor did they like to retain God in their knowledge. It is the law of the Lord only that converteth the soul, and maketh wise the simple. With this the Holy Spirit co-operates, in convincing the world of sin, and leading men to the Saviour.

2. The conversion of the gentiles is expressed more particularly, by the Lord's *taking out of them a people for his name*. This is the end for which he visited them, and is the distinguishing feature of true conversion.

(1) Observe, wherever the gospel comes, *it is with designs of mercy* that God may have a people. How affecting is this language, if applied to us and to other nations of the world! Rom. ix. 25, 26. Wherever God sends his gospel, there he has a people: where the gospel departs, or ceases to be preached in its purity, there is no longer a people for God.

(2) *The sovereignty of divine grace* in all this. It is not all to whom the gospel is sent that become the people of God, but those only to whom it is applied by the Holy Spirit. He takes "out of them" a people for his name. This accords with fact in all places and ages of the world; for wherever some are saved by the hearing of faith, there are many who wonder and perish. Persons may be called christians where the gospel comes, and may think themselves so; but they only are so in reality, who are separated and distinguished from the common mass, and come out from among them. Congregations are called christians, but it is only those whom the Lord hath taken out from among them that are his people. It is the same with families: seldom are whole households converted, but those only who are taken out from the rest. Jer. iii. 14. Those who are thus graciously distinguished, are frequently the most unlikely; such as are reckoned babes in knowledge, while the wise and prudent are blinded by their own conceit. Matt. xi. 25. 1 Cor. i. 26—29.

(3) *The reason assigned* for the conversion of sinners is, that God may have a people "for his name," for his own honour and glory. Unless God had a people in the world, his authority would not be respected, the riches of his grace and the efficacy of his gospel would be

unknown. God therefore will form a people for himself, that they may show forth his praise. Isaiah xliii. 21.

II. Observe the wisdom of God in respect to the time when he visited the gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

1. It was *under the reign of the Messiah*, "at the first," or immediately on his ascension. Then was the Spirit poured out from on high, and the wilderness became a fruitful field. Isai. xxxii. 15. Mercy then began its wonderful career, and the jubilee was sounded amongst all nations.

2. It was when *the greater part of the Jewish nation had rejected Christ.* Those who had been the people of God now ceased to be such, and were shortly to be destroyed. Israel was not gathered, and therefore God would take out of the gentiles a people for his name. Rom. ix. 24, 26.

3. It was a time *when great and importunate prayer was made* by the Church of God. Acts i. 14; ii. 42. Now therefore he would send the gospel far off among the gentiles.

4. It was when *extraordinary efforts* were making for the spread of the gospel, and when the disciples went every where preaching the word. Acts viii. 4.

SELF-EXAMINATION.

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?—2 Corinthians xiii. 5.

We are here exhorted to a duty of great importance, and which requires to be attended to with the utmost care and fidelity.

To "examine" means to inspect, to make trial, to enter upon a strict enquiry; and for this purpose, to commence with our own hearts. To "prove" is to try ourselves as metals are tried: if found pure, they are approved: if not, they are rejected, and esteemed as reprobate. Jer. vi. 30.

I. Consider the characters that are here addressed.

1. The exhortation to self-examination is not addressed to *manifest unbelievers,* for it would be sufficiently evident that they are not "in the faith," without any examination. Many who attend the gospel are still in this situation; instead of being in the faith, they are open enemies to it. The immediate duty of such, in reference to this subject, is not self-examination, but to repent and believe the gospel. There is such a communing with their own hearts as may lead to a conviction of sin; but as to their being in the faith, who can imagine it, while they

are living without God in the world, and at enmity against the truth. Or if the christian faith be generally and loosely admitted, yet it does not work by love, nor purify the heart, nor produce any of the fruits of righteousness.

2. Neither is the exhortation directly addressed to *manifest believers*, for this would in part be unnecessary. There are some whose souls prosper, and are in health, abounding in the work of faith, and labour of love. For them to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Such characters will naturally be led to make trial of themselves as David did, Psal. xxvi. 1—3: but Paul would not have addressed them in the language of the text. He would rather have said to them, as he did to the believing Hebrews, 'But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you;' or as Peter to the believers in his day, 'Whom having not seen, ye love.' Heb. vi. 9. 1 Pet. i. 8.

3. The exhortation is addressed to *doubtful characters*, and such were many among the Corinthians. They were much employed in passing censure, and sitting in judgment upon the apostles; and Paul had to make a long defence of himself and his brethren in this epistle. But having done this, he turns upon them with wonderful force in the language of the text: ver. 6.

II. The question at issue: "Whether ye be in the faith," or true believers.

1. It is here supposed that this is a point of such importance *as to involve our salvation*. If we are in the faith, all the other graces will follow in the train; as repentance, love, and the hope of eternal life. If not in the faith, it matters not what else we are; our hopes and our doings are all in vain. John iii. 36.

2. Ourbeing in the faith *is not always evident*, and concerning which we are liable to mistake. Some may *think they are not*, when they really are, their evidences being obscured by some partial declension; or for want of clearer views of the faith of the gospel, or from natural dejection and despondency; in which state of mind they refuse to be comforted. Others may *think they are* in the faith, when in truth they are not, but are mere nominal christians. Some who embrace a false gospel, or a distorted system of evangelical principles, are often extremely confident of their state; but it would become them much more to examine themselves, than to boast of their election of God.

III. The criterion by which our state is to be known, namely, "That Jesus Christ is in us, except we be reprobates.

If we be in the faith, Christ is in us, dwelling in our hearts by faith. This is a matter so evident, that the apostle supposes them to know it without his teaching. But how does Christ dwell in his people?

1. *By his word*, the indwelling of which includes the indwelling of the Saviour. John xv. 7. If we are in the faith, the words of Christ will be sweet and acceptable to us. His doctrine will not offend, but will be to us the words of eternal life. John vi. 56, 68.

2. *By his Spirit*, and the same mind being in us which was also in Christ Jesus. Phil. ii. 7. If so, we shall cherish the same disposition towards God, towards man, and towards ourselves. Every thing that was dear to him will be dear to us; the name of the Lord, his worship, his people, and his interest in the world. It is not enough to have Christ in our lips, he must be in our hearts: we must possess his spirit, or we are none of his. Rom. viii. 9.

If any are conscious that they are not in the faith, and that Christ is not in them; let them remember that the door of faith is still open, and they may enter in and be saved.

FRUITS OF AGED PIETY.

The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be fat and flourishing, to show that the Lord is upright. He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.—Psalm xcii. 12—15.

The congregations of Israel, like those in modern times, were composed of various characters; and this psalm, which was written for the Sabbath day, draws a line of distinction between the spiritual and the formal worshipper. It teaches us that true spiritual worship consists in giving thanks, ver. 4, 5. It then describes the graceless worshipper, and pronounces his doom, ver. 6—11. In the text the spiritual worshipper is introduced, with the great advantages which he enjoys.

I. Offer a few explanatory remarks upon the text.

1. The true worshipper is compared to *a palm tree*, an evergreen, in opposition to the wicked who are as grass, ver. 7. They are both said to "flourish," the one in temporal things, in wealth and fame; the other in things spiritual and divine. The one is only for a little while, and to be cut down; the other will abide for ever. The palm tree is said to grow under the greatest pressure; in this it is an emblem of the aged saint, growing in grace under the weight of years, ver. 14. What is still more singular, the palm tree is not only an evergreen, but it bears fruit: dates grow on it like bunches of grapes. Cant. vii. 10. One historian remarks that this tree will continue to bear fruit for seventy years, and yield nearly four hundred pounds weight of dates at a time. If so, it is a fit emblem of a fruitful believer in the decline of life. He is also compared to the *cedar*, which is also an evergreen, distinguished by its size and height.

2. The fruitful christian is likened to a tree *planted in a friendly soil*, even "in the house of the Lord," which is like a garden in which

the righteous grow up, and bear fruit to old age. The house of the Lord is indeed a genial soil to all believers, who are like trees planted by the rivers of water, bringing forth fruit in their season. Psal. i. 3. There are righteous men scattered up and down in the world, and who dwell alone; but they seldom grow much; and those who neglect the ordinances of public worship, while within their reach, are not likely to make any progress in religion. Heb. x. 25.

3. The *religion* of those who are thus planted, is represented as being *permanent*. They "still bring forth fruit in old age." They are not like those who in a time of temptation and persecution wither away, but endure to the end, and are saved. This is the character of a real christian, and no one besides is so.

4. Their abiding fruitfulness shows that *the Lord is upright*, and that there is no unrighteousness in him. If he were a hard master, or had dealt unkindly with them, they would not have continued in his service; but to the end of life they can speak well of his holy name. Or had he not fulfilled all his promises towards them, their faith and patience would have failed. Josh. xxiii. 14.

II. Notice more particularly the leading idea in the text, and that is, the fruits of old age.

Age is seen in the works of nature and of art, in the vegetable and animal creation, and more especially in the human frame, where all is perishing and going to decay. But human nature does not improve by age, for though certain vices may lose their power, there are others which gain an ascendancy, in proportion as years increase. It is not so however with the aged christian: in him tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope. Rom. v. 3, 4.

More particularly—

1. Old age is a time in which *troubles generally bear down the spirits;* and in those who are unsanctified, they commonly produce peevishness and discontent. But in the aged saint they produce meekness, patience, and submission to the will of God; the heart is softened by adversity, and becomes like a mellowed soil. The fire of youth would put up with but few things, but age with every thing consistent with truth and a good conscience, for the sake of peace.

2. Old age is a time in which *experience becomes mature*, and the judgment is ripened into decision; but if unsanctified, it produces invincible obstinacy. In an aged saint it is otherwise; the large experience he has had of his own ignorance, weakness, and depravity, makes him humble, and fills him with the meekness of wisdom. There is indeed a constitutional meekness in some, the effect rather of imbecility; but in aged christians it is the product of true wisdom. They are adorned with mercies, kindness, and long-suffering; and these are graces that sit easy upon them. Col. iii. 12, 13.

3. It is a time in which *heaven draws near, and hope goes forth to meet it.* Unsanctified old age is generally covetous of the world, though so soon to leave it. The lusts of the flesh have spent their force, the pride of life has lost its charms, and depravity has but one channel

left; here therefore it runs deeper and stronger as it reaches the dread abyss. But the aged saint is looking for a higher and a better portion; his language is like that of the aged Paul, 'I am now ready to be offered up, and the time of my departure is at hand.' The body bows and leans upon a staff, but the spirit cries with good old Jacob. 'I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.'

UNPROFITABLE HEARING OF THE WORD.

For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.—Hebrews iv. 2.

In various ways does the apostle set before these believing Hebrews the example of their forefathers, many of whom perished through unbelief. They had a promised land, but came short of it: let us therefore fear, lest we should lose heaven in the same way, ver. 1. They also heard "the gospel," or, the good news of deliverance from Egypt; but it did not profit them, not being mixed with faith. We have a better gospel preached to us, but let us take care, lest by a dereliction of the truth, we perish after the same example of unbelief.

I. Consider wherein consists that gospel which is preached unto us, and whether it be mixed with faith in them that hear it.

We ought not to take it for granted, that what we hear from the lips of any mere man is certainly the gospel. It becomes us to examine the Scriptures for ourselves, and to bring every doctrine to that test. Isai. viii. 20. In the New Testament a summary is given us of the gospel in various passages, and the amount of all is, That our salvation is of grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. 1 Cor. i. 23. xv. 1—3. 1 Tim. i. 15. 1 John v. 11.

This then is "the gospel," which we have read and heard: and now the great question is whether it be mixed with faith. We have probably understood its general import; but have we obeyed it from the heart and received the truth in love? If so, it will to us be glad tidings, and the Saviour will be precious, as he is to all them that believe.

More particularly—

1. The gospel supposes *the purity and equity of the divine law*, or no such expensive sacrifice would have been made to honour it as was made by the cross of Christ. The awful truth is attested, that he was made a curse for us; but if the law were not holy, just, and good; that sacrifice might and ought to have been spared. But if any one imagines that the law is rigorous and unjust, and that Christ came to deliver us from it as an evil; he neither does nor can believe the gospel. Rom. iii. 31.

2. The gospel implies *the exceeding sinfulness of sin*, or no such sacrifice would have been required for its expiation. Sin never appeared so heinous as in the cross of Christ: hence if any one believes the gospel, the more he thinks of Christ, the more he will loathe himself for his own vileness. But if the doctrine of the cross makes a person easy in his sins, he neither understands nor believes the gospel.

3. It supposes that we are *justly exposed to the wrath to come*, or Jesus would not have come to deliver us from it. 1 Thess. i. 10. We were in the very pit of destruction, and he descended, not only from heaven, but into the deepest abasement, to raise us up. Do we then believe that our condemnation would be just? If so, we shall receive mercy as a free gift, and pardon as one that deserves to die.

4. It supposes the *utter insufficiency of all our doings to recommend us to God*, or he would not have provided for us a better righteousness than our own, by the obedience of his Son. Do we believe this? If so, we shall forever renounce all our own worthiness and desire only to be found in Christ. Phil. iii. 9. We shall no longer go about to establish our own righteousness, but willingly submit to the righteousness of God.

5. The gospel supposes *the all-sufficiency and willingness of Christ to save* all that come to him by faith. Do we believe this, as one of its distinguishing properties? If so, we shall come to him, that we may find rest to our souls. Matt. xi. 28. But if we despond, and can find no comfort in the gospel; if we are looking for some meetness to warrant us to come, or think ourselves willing to be saved, but fear that Christ is not willing; we do not mix faith with what we hear. John vi. 37. Heb. vii. 25.

6. The gospel gives assurance of *mercy to the most unworthy*, to sinners as such, without any regard to previous character. If we believe this, we shall come to Christ for life and salvation, and come as ready to perish. But if we want to take encouragement from any thing in ourselves, instead of relying wholly upon the overtures of mercy, we do not mix faith with what we hear.

II. Observe the consequences of hearing the gospel with faith, or without it.

If the former, it will be to the saving of the soul: if the latter, the word preached will not profit us.

If we hear in faith, it will *unite us to Christ*, and so give us a revealed interest in him. We shall be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ Jesus. 1 Cor. i. 30. Phil. iii. 8. John i. 12.

2. If we mix faith with the gospel, it will *remove a load of guilt and misery*, and introduce us to the rest which Christ has promised. Matt. xi. 29. Rom. v. 1. Heb. iv. 3.

3. If we hear in faith, *we shall have access to God*, and access with confidence: and in a world of temptation and sorrow, there is no privilege like this. Ephes. iii. 12. Heb. iv. 16.

4. Hearing in faith, *all the promises become ours;* and as it was with Abraham when he went abroad to view the land, so God says to us, 'All this will I give thee.'

5. *Eternal life* will be the portion of every one that believes, and they already receive an earnest of it in the present world. John iii. 36; xvii. 3.

But if in hearing the gospel we have not mixed faith with it, our labour is lost, and our duties are of no avail: our present advantages will only aggravate our future doom.

(1) We see here that God will *clear his gospel* from all the reproaches cast upon it by infidels and unbelievers, who have represented it as a great evil in the world, as if all the injuries and oppressions inflicted by professing christians were the effect of christianity. Whereas, the world did *not believe it*, or these evils would have been prevented.

(2) We see what will become of those who *obey not the gospel*, and do not mix faith with hearing. They will come short of the promised rest, and perish in the wilderness. Heb. iii. 18, 19.

CHRISTIAN MODERATION.

But this I say, brethren, the time is short; it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away.—1 Corinthians vii. 29—31.

We are here taught how the world may be rendered subservient to religion, and how to derive spiritual advantage from all the concerns of the present life. There is nothing in the Scriptures to check our ardour after heavenly things, nor need there, but every thing to increase and inflame our love: but in our worldly concerns we are taught the duty of moderation. The Scriptures do not prohibit the use of worldly good, they only teach us how to possess it with advantage.

I. Notice the particulars in which the duty of moderation is to be exercised.

1. In our *attachments* to our nearest and dearest friends, to those relations which are the foundation of all others. "They that have wives are to be as though they had none." The apostle does not mean that they are to be treated with indifference, for men are taught to love their wives, even as Christ loved the church. Ephes. v. 25. But all is to be in subordination to the love of Christ. When God calls us to part, we are to yield to his will. The patriarchs wept on these occasions, but did not despair as if they had lost their all. Gen. xxiii. 2.

2. In our *sorrows* for the loss of earthly good. In some cases this is apt to rise to excess, so that the party is never happy any more;

but this shows that we had made idols of what God had given us. Amidst all our bereavements it becomes us to say, The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord: and when friends and relations die, The Lord liveth, and blessed be my rock. God will have all our heart, and he takes away our enjoyments that it may be so.

3. In our *joys* as well as in our sorrows. We are allowed in the day of prosperity to be joyful, but our joy must be temperate; and when we do rejoice, it must be with trembling. If unduly elated with prosperity, it portends a fall; and if inordinate grief overwhelms us in the day of adversity, it shows that our strength is small. Eccles. vii. 14. Prov. xxiv. 10.

4. In our *worldly possessions.* He that thrives in his business, and is heaping up riches, is in danger of setting his heart upon them; yet this is the spirit of the world, and not that of a real christian. Psal. xlix. 11—13. We are to consider all these things as not our own, but only lent us for a season, and for the use of which we must give an account. 1 Pet. iv. 10. 1 Tim. vi. 17—19.

5. As to *the whole* of what pertains to the present world, the same duty is enjoined. We are to "use this world as not abusing it," and to beware of excess. Our concern must be to apply every thing to the purposes for which it is given. All our earthly comforts are to be received with thanksgiving, but they are not to be our portion, so as to take the place of God. They are not to engage our thoughts and affections, to the exclusion of heavenly things, nor in a way of preference, for this would be inconsistent with the love of God. Neither are we to value ourselves on account of our riches or worldly possessions, for the Scriptures attach no importance to such distinctions. We are to consider ourselves as stewards, not as masters and owners, like the foolish Nabal. 1 Sam. xxv. 11. If we use our temporal mercies as steps to ascend to God, if we see his hand in all, and employ all for his glory and the good of mankind, the world will not hurt us.

II. The motives by which this duty is enforced: "The time is short, and the fashion of this world passeth away."

1. The fleeting nature of all *worldly good.* It is of short duration, and therefore cannot affect us much. Short pains and short pleasures are of small account, for they will soon be over; and what is life, when we look back upon it? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

2. The *want of reality* in all these things. They are only a "fashion," a shifting scene, that forms nothing but an ideal world. Men are walking in a vain show, and are disquieted in vain. Psal. xxxix. 5, 6. Placing our affections on worldly possessions, or on any form of created good, is only setting our eyes upon that which is not; for while we look at it, it is passing away. Prov. xxiii. 5.

THE LATTER-DAY GLORY.

And let the whole earth be filled with his glory: Amen, and Amen.— Psalm lxxii. 19.

This is the last psalm that David wrote, and in its general import it agrees with his last words, as recorded in 2 Sam. xxiii. Both of them relate to the coming and kingdom of the Messiah, of which his heart was full; and he never seems to have had his soul more enlarged than when meditating on this subject. The glory predicted in this psalm may relate in part, and more immediately, to the reign of Solomon, yet it is evident that the writer looked beyond it, to the reign of the Messiah; and of this we need no greater proof than the text itself.

(1) The "glory" here spoken of means the glory of God *as the God of grace.* The earth was already full of his glory as the God of nature and providence, and all his works praise him. Isaiah vi. 3.

(2) The object now in view corresponds with the *original design* of God, in all he did for Israel; which was, not that the blessing should stop with them, but be extended to all the world. Gen. xii. 2 Psal. lxvii. 1. 2.

(3) This design agrees with *the prophecies* contained in this psalm, particularly ver. 8—17.

(4) It agrees with that affection for the *name of the Lord*, expressed in the first clause of the verse before us: and he that loves that holy name will desire to see it honoured, and long for the day when the earth shall be full of his glory.

Three things in the text demand attention: first, what is implied in the prayer of David: next, what is more immediately expressed: and lastly, the grounds on which we may expect this prayer to be answered.

I. Notice what is implied in the petition.

In general it supposes, that the earth is *not* full of the divine glory: on the contrary, its present state in a great degree resembles that of the old world. Gen. vi. 11. Things are indeed better than they have been, better than they were in David's time. God was then known only in Israel, and his dwelling-place was only in Zion: but now he is known in many nations, and his tabernacle is among them. The kingdom of Satan has received a shock, from which it never shall recover; and millions have come from the east and from the west to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God. Still however, much remains to be done; for—

1. The greater part of the earth continues to be overspread with *gross idolatry*, and all its attendant abominations. God is not known, nor is his name adored. Satan reigns over immense regions undisturbed, and sin without controul. The state of the eastern nations affords an awful proof of this affecting truth.

2. In a large part of the world where God's name *is* acknowledged,

his Son and his gospel are rejected. This is the case especially with those nations that are overspread with mahomedan delusions, and where every species of lasciviousness and cruelty prevail. Christ and his gospel are discarded, and a rival is set up in his stead. In all nations professing christianity there is besides a great multitude of deists.

3. In those nations where *the name of Christ is acknowledged*, his truth is nevertheless discredited by a large majority; and they are christians in name only, and not in heart. We see much to be thankful for in the beneficial influence of the gospel upon society at large, yet we are far from seeing all things put under Christ. There is still a great deal of contempt of serious religion, a prevailing disposition to profane the Sabbath, and to indulge in immoralities, among all classes. At present therefore the earth is overspread with sin and darkness.

II. Notice what is immediately expressed in this petition: "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory."

The glory here predicted of Christ's kingdom, is prefigured by the glory of Solomon's reign, the most splendid of all the kings of Israel; and there are several points of resemblance.

1. The honour and advancement of Solomon's kingdom was *preceded by wars and great calamities* in the reign of David. Hence he was called a man of blood, and Solomon a man of peace. This however was one way in which God filled the earth with his glory, as in the awful judgments upon Pharaoh and Egypt. Exod. ix. 16. Afterwards he filled the earth with his glory by his judgments upon Babylon. Hab. ii. 14. Thus also he may again prepare the way for his acts of mercy, by his judgments upon another Egypt and another Babylon. Rev. xviii.

2. The glory of Solomon's reign consisted of *peace and rest:* and all that went before was preparatory to it. 1 Kings iv. 25. A glorious state of rest and safety is also to be a leading feature in Christ's kingdom, Isai. xi. 10; denoting an established government, succeeding to wars and troubles, as Solomon's peaceful empire succeeded the troubles of David's reign. Two things in particular will distinguish the reign of Christ in the latter day—(1) The general resort of Jews and gentiles to the Saviour. Psal. lxxii. 11.—(2) The total cessation of all oppression and persecution, ver. 6—9.

3. Solomon's reign was distinguished, not only by its peace and rest, but by its *public buildings*, wealth, and greatness. It was then that the temple was built, and this was reckoned more glorious than the rest. This was the end for which all the other was designed; and the building up of the spiritual temple will be the result of all the overturnings of nations and of empires that have gone before; and when the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory. Psal. cii. 16. What was said of the primitive churches, Acts ix. 31, will then apply to all the churches of Christ on earth. But before the whole earth can be filled with his glory, it must first be filled with *his gospel*, and Christ's commission to his servants must be carried into execution. Matt. xxviii. 18, 19. The divine glory will then be seen, in the abun-

dance of his faithfulness and truth. The church itself, no longer disfigured with the meretricious ornaments of the mother of harlots, will then shine forth in all her native beauty and gracefulness, as the bride, the Lamb's wife. Rev. xxi. 9.

III. The grounds on which we may expect the fulfilment of this petition to which David has put his "Amen, and Amen."

Judging from appearances, and the revulsions of the kingdom of antichrist, the prospect is somewhat discouraging. The thorns and the briars of paganism, of Mahomedanism, of popery, and of false religion everywhere infest the ground, and hinder the spread of the gospel: but the Lord will pass through them and burn them up, and who shall set them in battle against him? Isai. xxvii. 4.

1. We are assured that the whole earth shall be filled with the glory of God, from *the promises made especially to Christ;* and the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform it. Psal. ii. 8. Isai. ix. 7. xlix. 6. liii. 11.

2. The prophecies and *promises given to the church of God*, ensure the fulfilment of this petition. The stone cut out of the mountain without hands is to become a great mountain, and fill the whole earth; a little leaven is to leaven the whole lump; and the kingdom shall be given to the saints of the Most High. Dan. ii. 34, 35. vii. 18, 27.

3. The *prophecies already accomplished*, add to this assurance. These are the first-fruits of the harvest, and the certain pledge of all that is to follow.

While however it becomes us to be looking forward on behalf of the world, let us not forget ourselves, and our own state and condition. What would it profit us, if all the world were saved, and we ourselves be lost? Yet if the interest of Christ lies near our hearts, it will show that we are his true subjects, and faithful friends. In that case also we shall reiterate the prayer of David with the utmost fervour and satisfaction, saying, "Thy kingdom come, and let the whole earth be filled with thy glory: Amen, and Amen."

LIFE AND SALVATION IN CHRIST ALONE.

And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.—1 John v. 11.

These few expressive words contain an epitome of the whole gospel, which in a preceding verse is called a testimony or witness, and here a record, the testimony having now been committed to writing. The term "record" also denotes the permanency of the gospel, that it is now irrevokable, and is God's memorial unto all generations. To its inviolability the Three in heaven, and three on earth, are said to bear witness,

ver. 7, 8. Of its truth and certainty every believer also has an inward witness, and sets to his seal that God is true; but every unbeliever, by rejecting his testimony makes God a liar, and comes into condemnation.

The apostle in the text is personating believers, when he says, God hath "given to us" eternal life. In the gift of Christ *for* us, we are considered as sinners; but in the bestowment of eternal life *upon* us, we are considered as believers. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life. John iii. 36.

I. Explain and illustrate the doctrine of the text.

1. By *eternal life* is not meant merely a perpetuity of existence. God in creating us immortal may be said to have given us this already, having 'breathed into man a living soul.' Eternal life then is the opposite of eternal death, or of an everlasting separation from God, and includes the enjoyment of endless felicity.

2. Eternal life being *the gift of God*, implies that we have forfeited all by sin, and that it can never be obtained by our own obedience. It was comprised in the covenant of works made with man in innocence, but all is lost by disobedience. The law which was ordained unto life, is found to be unto death. How ignorant soever men may be of the great evil of sin, all know that they are sinners, and therefore might know that there is no hope of eternal life from any worthiness in us; and that if ever we be saved, it must be by mere grace.

3. This life being *in his Son*, informs us that the way in which God bestows it upon us as sinners is through the mediation of Christ. This is the grand peculiarity of the gospel: hence it was that the doctrine of the cross became a stumbling-block to the Jews, and to the Greeks foolishness, as it is with many now, who are ready to ask, Why could not God forgive sin without an atonement, and save us without a Mediator. Certainly, it is not for want of love, or of power to do it, but a supreme regard to righteousness forbids. Equity and consistency are the foundation of government, nor is it possible that the government of the universe could rest on any other basis. If God had forgiven sin without some public expression of his hatred to it, it would have appeared as if he had connived at it, and all he had said against it in the prohibition and theatenings of his holy law would have stood for nothing. Hence the punishment of the fallen angels; for if he could have passed by one instance of rebellion, why not another. The effect of this would have been injurious to the government, by destroying that respect which was due to it from all his creatures. Or had there been salvation without an atonement, it must have been at the expense of truth and righteousness, and this would have been a damp to all holy beings. But through the incarnation and obedience of the Son of God, all these impediments are at once removed. God's righteousness is now declared, even in the remission of sin: he can now be just and yet the justifier of him that believeth. Rom. iii. 25, 26. 2 Cor. v. 20, 21.

In this important transaction, three qualifications appear to be neces-

sary in the character of a Mediator—personal dignity, so that in his sufferings there might be a sufficient expression of the divine displeasure against sin: the possession of a nature susceptible of suffering: and perfect purity.

(1) *Dignity of person* and character is necessary to him who shall be the Mediator betwixt God and man. If in showing his displeasure against sin, God had directed the slaying of an animal, would that have been sufficient? It did for types, but no more. What would such a sacrifice be in the sight of God, and how could it attract the attention of the universe? If a human being, though innocent, had been made a sacrifice, it would not have had sufficient weight in the general system; for what proportion can there be between one individual of the human species, and the whole universe of intelligent beings. But oh, for God so to love the world, as to give his only begotten Son, and to deliver him up for us all, is an object of sufficient magnitude to fix the admiration of heaven and earth. Rev. v. 12, 13.

(2) He must possess the *same nature as the offender*, not only to be susceptible of divine displeasure, but that all might see it was *for man* he suffered. Hence it was necessary, not only that sin should be openly condemned, but that it should be condemned 'in the flesh.' Rom. viii. 3. Heb. ii. 14.

(3) A Mediator must in this case be *perfectly innocent and holy*. If Moses had not been free from the idolatry and rebellion of the people of Israel, his prayer could not have been heard on their behalf; but the Lord would pardon them for his sake. Exod. xxxii. 11—14. Such an intercessor became us, through whom we also might obtain forgiveness. Heb. 7. 26. Ephes. iv. 32.

I. Consider the interest we have in this subject.

1. We are all immortal and accountable creatures, and things are come to such an issue, that *eternal life or eternal misery must be our portion.* We cannot go back into nonexistence, immortality is impressed upon our nature. Neither can we go into any intermediate state, we must go forward. The gates of heaven stand open, and so does the mouth of hell; one of these we must finally enter.

2. Having heard the gospel, there is now *no other alternative*, but to believe it and be saved, or to make God a liar and be lost for ever. We cannot now stand in the situation of heathens, who have nothing but the light of nature; for unto us is the word of this salvation sent. Acts iv. 12.

3. As God gives eternal life, so we must be willing to *receive it merely as a free gift*, and to be numbered among the chief of sinners, or we can never enjoy it.

4. As he gives it *only in his Son*, so that must be the way in which we seek it, or we shall never find it. This is the great stumbling-block with many, let us therefore beware that we do not perish through unbelief. Rom. ix. 32.

6. As this is God's way of giving salvation, so if we thus seek it *we shall be sure to find it.* Every one that seeketh, findeth; and to him

that knocketh, it shall be opened. There is no sin too great to be forgiven, no sinner so lost but he may be saved. Isai. lv. 7.

6. Think of the important *prize held up to view*, eternal life and blessedness. To miss of this will incur a loss that can never be estimated, and never be repaired. Matt. xvi. 26.

MOTIVES TO CHRISTIAN PERSEVERANCE.

The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.—Proverbs iv. 18.

Solomon was an attentive observer of the conduct of mankind; he noticed the way in which wicked men were walking, and the way of the righteous; and in various parts of this book he gives us his observations on their different results. The text describes the way of the just, in opposition to that of the wicked, and the contrast is strongly marked.

(1) Observe, that true religion is *the way* in which a good man walks, It is his general conduct, his habitual course, not an accidental thing, but the business of his whole life.

(2) Though the way is safe and good, and will end well, yet it is supposed to be attended with difficulties and *darkness*, especially in its commencement. The pilgrim is bewildered for a time, and sees men as trees walking.

(3) The path will, notwithstanding, be more illumined and more pleasant, the father we *advance* in it. The darkness will in time be dissipated, the difficulties be removed, and "the light will shine more and more unto the perfect day."

(4) It is not implied however, that every good man will make the same advances, or that any one will make *the same progress* at all times. A traveller may pass through many a deep valley, and yet on the whole be on rising ground. So the believer, though he meets with many difficulties, and may seem at times to be going backward rather than forward, is on the whole making some progress, though he may advance by slow degrees.

(5) What is here said of "the just," is not so much spoken of *him* as of his "path;" for however it may be with us, it is of the nature of true religion to be progressive.

Illustrate the truth taught us in the text, by observing,

I. The more we advance in the knowledge of God and of Christ, the more light and comfort we shall find in our christian course.

At first setting out in the ways of God we are like a traveller who begins his journey before the sun is up, and who walks many miles by

twilight. Our judgment is weak, we walk in uncertainty, and our way is dark; but the light will increase as we go on, and our path become plainer as we pursue it.

1. *Providence often appears very dark*, at the commencement of our religious course; but as we advance, its mysteries are unfolded. It was thus with Jacob, in the earlier part of his pilgrimage. When Joseph was so mysteriously taken from him, he had to walk more than twenty years in darkness, not knowing what so extraordinary an event could mean. It seemed to contradict all the promises which God had made to him, and the heavenly visions given to his beloved son; but when he went down into Egypt, all was made plain, and innumerable circumstances in his former life received the brightest illustration. It is not unfrequently thus with the christian, who by a train of mysterious events is brought to the knowldge of the truth, and led in paths that he had not known. Isai. xlii. 16.

2. *The doctrines of the gospel appear dark and mysterious*, on our first setting out in the ways of God. We generally commence with a very slender knowledge of divine things, and under many mistaken apprehensions; but as we advance, the light increases. Happily, the way-faring man though a fool shall not err; the great and leading principles of the gospel will be imbibed, where the heart is right with God, and one fundamental truth will gradually lead to a discovery of the rest. It is the same with error; it eats as doth a canker, and increases unto more ungodliness. But let a man become acquainted with the real character of God, and the plague of his own heart; and he will not fail to embrace those those important truths which lie at the foundation of a sinner's acceptance with God. The disciples of our Lord commenced their course amidst a great deal of darkness, and were much perplexed about the nature of his kingdom; but after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, every thing became plain; the doctrine of the atonement led them to an acquaintance with the doctrine of all the prophets. Luke xxiv. 25—27, 45—47.

3. *Divine truth itself becomes more interesting as we pursue it.* Nothing like this can be said of any other kind of knowledge; on the contrary, 'he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.' Men of science have been sated with learning, and have found with Solomon that all is vanity and vexation of spirit. Not so the knowledge of God; it is eternal life to possess it, and it creates an insatiable thirst for more. Phil. iii. 8, 10. Ephes. iii. 18, 19. Angels, though not immediately interested in the blessings of redemption, find their happiness increased by an acquaintance with the subject. Ephes. iii. 10. Thus also it is with believers in the present life, and will be so in the world to come; where we shall explore with increasing interest and delight, the wonders of redeeming love. 2 Pet. i. 2. Rev. vii. 17.

4. The more we truly know of God, *The more communion we shall have with him*, and that will shed a light upon our path. Spiritual knowledge is the medium of intercourse; and if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we shall have fellowship with God. 1 John i. 3. It is in his light that we shall see light, and fine our path brightening as we proceed, till we meet the dawn of an eternal day.

II. The more we do the will of God, and serve him upon earth, the more easy and delightful will his service become.

Though religion is founded in knowledge, it does not consist in knowledge merely, but in doing the will of God from the heart; and in keeping his commandments there is great reward.

1. The more we abound *in any spiritual disposition*, the more easy and pleasant it will be. Exercise makes every thing easy, it is by exercise that habits are formed, and what is habitual becomes natural and easy. It is so, as to self-denial, patience under affliction, and forbearance amidst injuries received. These will not only become more easy by exercise, but yield us much comfort.

2. It is the same *in holy duties*, as in spiritual dispositions; the more we abound in them, the more easy the performance. Prayer may be so neglected as to become painful and difficult, and some have refrained prayer, till they can scarcely pray at all. On the contrary we may so delight ourselves in the Lord as to find the richest enjoyment in our approaches to him, and wish to dwell evermore near his throne. It is the same in hearing, and in preaching the word; they become more pleasant and easy by exercise; and in every holy duty, the more a man does for God the more he may.

3. As we advance in the path of duty, we shall find *many difficulties removed*, and the mountain will become a plain before us. We complain of hindrances in the way; but when we have made the trial, they are much fewer than we imagine. We have said 'there is a lion in the way,' when no real danger was to be apprehended. Let us only go in the strength of the Lord God, and all will be practicable and easy; 2 Cor. xii. 9. Phil. iv. 13.

Let those who are setting out in the ways of God be encouraged to go on, the Sun of righteousness will rise upon them with healing under his wings.

But let the wicked remember that their way is dark, leading down to the chambers of death. The farther they advance the darkness will increase, till it ends in everlasting night.

CHRIST'S INTERCESSION ON THE CROSS.

Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.—Luke xxiii. 34.

What a surprising contrast, between the treatment which the blessed Saviour received from his enemies, and that which they received from him in return, ver. 33.

We here see the wisdom of God overruling the enmity of wicked men. They crucify Jesus, to render his name infamous; and place him between two malefactors, to cover him with reproach. But by this lin-

gering, painful, and shameful death, an opportunity was given for the Saviour more fully to express his love. While suspended on the cross he uttered many things, and all of them highly interesting and important. Here also he made intercession for the transgressors.

I. Observe the petition itself: "Father, forgive them."

How well this agrees with the language of prophecy. Isai. liii. 12.

1. Notice *the magnitude of the blessing* prayed for, even "forgiveness." This includes all other blessings, and an interest in eternal life. Sin is the great mountain that stands between God and us, and prevents the manifestation of his favour: if that be removed, all is removed. It is forgiveness that extracts the sting of death, and calms the terrors of a future judgment; for if God forgives, who is he that shall condemn. Forgiveness takes away the curse of the law, and the bitterness of all affliction in this life. In the present instance especially, it is a blessing greater than could be asked or thought, by any other than the blessed Redeemer himself.

2. Consider *the extreme unworthiness of the objects.* Surely, if such be pardoned, it must indeed be according to the riches of his grace. They were not common sinners, nor had they committed any common offence: they had killed the Prince of life, and crucified the Lord of glory. They had put him to open shame whom God had made heir of all things, and by whom also he made the worlds. To pray for such sinners was love operating against hatred, and doing good against evil in the highest sense possible. He had met with enough from their hands to turn his heart against them; but his was love that many waters could not quench, neither could the floods drown it. Such is his love to us also; for when we were enemies he died for us, and it is wholly owing to his intercession that we are spared and pardoned. Rom. v. 10.

3. The *heinous nature of their offence:* "they they know not what they do." This very plea implies that it was an awful sin they were committing, though they were blinded to it; it was one on which the heavens frowned with preternatural darkness, and the earth trembled while they perpetrated the dreadful deed. It was such as might have awaked the vengeance of God, to send out evil spirits and destroy them. For offering insult to an angel in human form, the inhabitants of Sodom were smitten with blindness; but the guilt of the inhabitants of Jerusalem is not to be described.

4. The *efficacy of the petition*, in securing the blessing prayed for. A good man might say of his murderers as Stephen did, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge; but it would not follow that they would certainly be forgiven. But the intercession of Christ is for ever prevalent, for him the Father heareth always. The blood which then flowed from the cross gave efficacy to his prayer; the plea itself was the cry of blood, even of that which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. The plea of the suffering Saviour had an immediate reference to his death, the very design of which was to procure the forgiveness of sin. In this instance therefore he showed what was the ob-

ject of his sacrifice, and how it would be carried into effect by his intercession. Luke xxiv. 46, 47.

II. The plea by which the petition is enforced: "they know not what they do."

1. It is such as would *have not been found by any other advocate.* Who indeed could have devised any plea whatever for such an offence, and for such sinners; or who dared so much as to think of a plea in such a case! Yet the blessed Saviour finds one, and the only one that could avail. 1 Tim. i. 13.

2. It is a plea which shows *that sin has different degrees of guilt,* according to the circumstances under which it is committed. Sins committed through ignorance and unbelief, though great are not so aggravated as those committed against light and knowledge: hence it was that Paul obtained mercy, while apostates find none. 1 Tim. i. 13. Heb. x. 26—29. Heathens, though guilty, are not so fearfully involved as those who have the gospel and reject it. Heb. ii. 3. xii. 25.

3. It is a plea which teaches us, that *for some there was no mercy,* though there might be for those on whose behalf it was offered. There is a sin unto death, which has no forgiveness in this world, nor in that which is to come. Matt. xii. 32. And there were some among the Jews for whom there was no mercy for what they had done in this matter, though the populace in general, and many of the rulers, knew not what they did; and hence it was that Peter afterwards exhorted them to repentance, in the hope of their being forgiven. Acts iii. 17—19.

4. Though their ignorance afforded a plea for mercy, *they were not to be pardoned without repentance.* Christ never prayed that sinners should be forgiven only in this way, nor that they should be pardoned before they repent, for this would be incompatible with the whole design of his mediation. His intercession for their pardon therefore includes repentance, and hence it was that such multitudes of the Jews were afterwards pricked to the heart under Peter's sermon. Acts ii. 37. Sinners must know what they have done, before they can expect mercy. Jer. ii. 19.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) We see there is that in the nature of sin which *surpasses all our conceptions.* When sinners offend against God, oppose the gospel, and reject the Saviour, "they know not what they do." Would any one if he knew it, offend his best friend, serve his worst enemy, and plunge himself into endless ruin? Or having brought himself into danger, would he reject the way of escape? Yet such is the case with every unbeliever.

(2) Still we learn that notwithstanding the evil nature of sin, *there is no reason for despair,* not even for the chief of sinners. If Jerusalem sinners can be pardoned, there is hope for all: and it was amongst these unparalleled offenders that the mercy was to begin, as an example to all nations. Luke xxiv. 47.

(3) The conduct of our blessed Lord is set before us in this instance *as an example*, teaching us what must be our spirit towards our enemies and persecutors. Stephen followed this example, and we must learn to do the same. Acts vii. 60. Matt. v. 44, 45.

THE ONLY RELIEF FOR THE ANXIETIES OF LIFE.

Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer, and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.—Philippians iv. 6.

It is the will of God that his people should live in a state of entire dependence upon him, like children upon a father. Hence our Lord directs his disciples not to be anxious about the things of the present life, for our heavenly Father knoweth what is needful for us. Matt. vi. 31, 32. The unbelieving world are seeking after present good, like beasts of prey that roam abroad; but real christians are a little flock, for whom the owner himself provides. This also is the sentiment inculcated in the text, which contains both caution and direction.

I. Consider the caution addressed to us: "Be careful for nothing."

1. The design certainly is not to dissuade us from *all care and concern of every kind*, much less that we should be indifferent or unmindful of our spiritual interests. There is a care which we are required to exercise with respect to the things of the present life, for we are to provide for our own house, and for things honest in the sight of all men. Some indeed have pleaded this language as an excuse for sloth and idleness, and in favour of a monastic life, as if the common and necessary concerns of the world were incompatible with true religion. But this is directly opposite to the Scriptures, which teach us to be diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Rom. xii. 11.

2. The design is to caution us against *anxious and inordinate care*, such as is accompanied with fretfulness, impatience, and distrust. We are apt to be careful in this way at all times; even in prosperity the cares of the world will come upon us, and the deceitfulness of riches are sure to beguile; but in the day of adversity these cares are greatly multiplied. Many have had to struggle hard and long with the difficulties of poverty, and are scarcely able to struggle any longer. Many who once were comfortably provided for, can now see no way before them, and are burdened with anxieties destructive of their peace. Others, who feel not these difficulties, are careful and solicitous about what may be, and are filled with gloomy apprehensions about the future But all such inordinate anxieties are to be laid aside, as dishonourable to God, and injurious to ourselves. This state of mind is made up of fretfulness, impatience, and distrust; and cannot after all make one hair

white or black. How much wiser therefore and better is the apostle's advice, to be careful for nothing, but to cast our burden upon the Lord, that he may sustain us. Psal. lv. 22. 1 Pet. v. 7.

II. The direction given us: "In every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known unto God."

Three things are here recommended; prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving—

"Prayer" relates chiefly to the removing or averting of evils, and supplication to the bestowment of good; a distinction frequently observed in the Scriptures. 1 Tim. ii. 1.

"Prayer and supplication" is more expressive of importunity than prayer only, and denotes the ardour of the soul in this holy duty. Dan. ix. 17, 20. Heb. v. 7. It also implies humility and deep contrition, and is the language of a penitent and contrite heart. 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13. Zech. xii. 10.

"Thanksgiving" shows that we are not to be so intent on the averting of evils, either feared or felt, as to be forgetful of the mercies that we enjoy; but like Solomon, while offering prayer and supplication for the people of Israel, we are to remember the lovingkindness and faithfulness of the Lord towards us. 1 Kings viii. 54—56.

The direction here given us may therefore include the following particulars—

1. Whatever evils may befal or threaten us, let us *carry them all to a throne of grace*, and "make our requests known unto God." He has appointed this means of relief, that we may feel our dependence upon him; that we may go to him day by day for our daily bread, as children to a father.

2. We are not to be content with *a form of prayer*, but to use importunity, and make supplication as Jacob did, who wrestled hard and obtained the blessing. Also that we 'set' ourselves to seek the Lord as Daniel did, by devoting some special times and seasons to that purpose. Dan. ix. 3.

3. We are not to be satisfied merely with *the removal of evil*, but to be importunate for the bestowment of real good. In making prayer and supplication, we are to lay hold of God's mercy and faithfulness, and to plead with him like the patriarch, saying 'Hast thou not said, I will surely do thee good?' Gen. xxxii. 12.

4. While imploring favours, let us not be unmindful of *past and present mercies*. When deprived of every earthly good, Job could bless the Lord for what he formerly possessed; and we still have much to be thankful for, whatever may be our present troubles.

5. The direction given us in the text will apply *to all cases;* it is a remedy for every evil and every ill. The promise immediately following the text also shows the unspeakable advantages connected with the advice given.

NATURE AND OFFICE OF CONSCIENCE.

The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly.—Proverbs xx. 27.

The text is not to be taken literally, but figuratively. "The spirit of man" does not here mean the soul, or the intellectual part generally; neither does the other expression mean the body, or the corporeal part of man; for the terms would then convey no distinct or intelligible meaning. But rather, by the former of these expressions is meant the *conscience*, and by the latter the *inmost soul*, as in the last clause of ver. 30.

The import of the passage seems to be, That conscience is God's superintendent in the soul of man, a light which he has placed there as a witness for himself.

I. Offer a few explanatory remarks on the nature of conscience in man.

In general it may be considered as that faculty of the mind, whose office it is to take cognizance of the good and evil of our own actions, motives, and dispositions.

1. In particular *it is knowledge*, and so a branch of the understanding. But though conscience is inward light and knowledge, it is distinguished from the understanding, which is that faculty by which we judge of the goood and evil in the actions of other persons. Conscience has only to do with our own actions.

2. It is *mere knowledge*, including in it neither good nor evil, though it takes cognizance of both. Real goodness does not consist in knowing what is right, but in loving and doing what is right. Conscience therefore, considered in itself, has nothing in it of moral goodness. Some have mistaken the dictates of conscience for *virtuous inclination*, or grace in the heart; and hence have called it 'the moral sense.' Conscience is indeed a sense of right and wrong, in things of a moral nature; but it contains in it no morality, any more than the sense of pain or pleasure. It exists in the best and in the worst of men, and will exist in them for ever, whatever be their character or condition. Devils also are the subjects of conscience, for they believe and tremble. Some have mistaken the dictates of conscience for those of *real religion;* and because they have felt strong conflicts between conscience and inclination, have supposed themselves the subjects of a spiritual warfare, and called these exercises by the name of christian experience. Others have mistaken the dictates of conscience for the *operations of grace*, and the influence of the Holy Spirit. What is called 'common grace,' and said to be given to all men, is nothing more than the workings of natural conscience, aided by adventitious circumstances. There is therefore no more propriety in calling this grace, than there would be in so de-

nominating any other of the intellectual faculties. Persons under strong convictions have appeared for a time to be the subjects of a work of grace, when it has only been the work of conscience, without any holy or saving effect. It is true we read of 'a good and evil conscience,' of a 'conscience void of offence,' and of a 'conscience that is defiled;' but these expressions do not strictly mean that there is either good or evil in conscience itself, but in being or not being conformed to its dictates and decisions. To preserve a conscience void of offence, for example, is to live in obedience to its dictates. Tenderness of conscience is, properly speaking, tenderness of spirit, fearing to violate a sense of right and wrong.

3. Though it be a light shining in all men, *it does not shine in all men in the same degree.* The clearness and strength of its dictates exist in various degrees in different persons, and in the same persons at different times. In general, conscience is enlightened according to the different advantages which we possess, either from early education, or religious instruction. There is a great difference between the conscience of heathens without a revelation, and that of persons who enjoy the privileges of the gospel; and so by comparison in other cases.
A system of false religion will sometimes pervert the dictates of conscience, and give it a wrong bias, as in the case of Saul of Tarsus, and many others, who are corrupted by pernicious principles. Evil habits will also defile the conscience, till it becomes seared as with a hot iron.

II. Consider the important office of conscience in the souls of men. It is "the candle of the Lord, which searches all the inward parts of the belly."

1. It is this light which leaves *the heathen world without excuse*, amidst their crimes and abominations. They are all conscious of being sinners, of doing that to others which they would not wish others to do to them, and are therefore violators of the law of equity. They are also conscious of being sinners before God, and of doing things worthy of death; and on this principle they will be condemned. Rom. i. 28—32. ii. 15.

2. It is this which *heightens the guilt of unbelievers*, and renders them still more inexcusable, amidst the advantages of the gospel dispensation. Hence the dreadful woe denounced against Bethsaida and Chorazin. Matt. xi. 21. It was the violation of conscience that rendered Cain so miserable, and filled the mind of Saul with despair. In the same way Herod the king was terrified and alarmed, after he had beheaded John the Baptist; for he knew him to be a righteous man, and had heard him gladly. Mark vi. 20.

3. It is this which renders those inexcusable, who while *under strong convictions of sin*, are still going about to establish their own righteousness, not submitting themselves to the righteousness of God. When under the terrors of an awakened conscience, any are fleeing for refuge to their own good works, it is dangerous to cherish in them the hope of salvation; for many have stumbled here, and perished. And even those who may eventually be saved, are nevertheless in a perilous condition, while unreconciled to the only medium of salvation.

4. It is the light of conscience that renders the loose and *carnal conduct of some professors*, so offensive in the sight of God. He that knoweth his Lord's will and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes. There is a sin unto death, as the apostle says; and it may be that the repeated and wilful violations of conscience in some men, render their sin unpardonable, as in the case of Saul and Judas, who deliberately sinned against light and knowledge. Heb. x. 26.

5. The voice of conscience will *stop the mouth of an ungodly world* in the day of judgment, and pronounce every man guilty before God. They will then know that his ways are equal, and that their condemnation is just, for conscience will be a thousand witnesses. Rom. iii. 19. Psal. li. 4.

6. It is this will render the *sufferings of the wicked* in a future world intolerable. Conscience will be like the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched. Some of its bitter effects are felt in this life, but in the end it will produce tribulation and anguish, and utter despair. Gen. iv. 13. Prov. v. 11—13.

7. It is by this light that *real christians are preserved* amidst various temptations. Gen. xxxix. 9. Let but conscience be enlightened and regulated by the word of God, and faithfully employed in the work of self-examination, and its importance will be seen and felt: for if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.

8. The testimony of conscience is the great *comfort and support of good men*, under all their persecutions and reproaches for Christ's sake, and will be a witness for them in the day of judgment. 2 Cor. i. 12. 1 Pet. iii. 16.

9. The office of conscience yields abundant *advantage to the christian ministry*. Notwithstanding the total depravity of mankind, all possess a conscience that is accessible to truth; and though the ministers of the word cannot always reach the heart, they can commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God; and in doing this they are pure from the blood of all, while the finally impenitent are left without excuse. John viii. 9. Acts xx. 33. 2 Cor. iv. 2

JACOB'S VOW.

And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God.—Genesis xxviii. 20, 21.

Vows, so common under the old testament, were a kind of religious and sacred promise, made before the Lord; and in the time of Moses a law was ordained for their regulation. Lev. xxvii. All vows are indicative of strong affection, and are solemnly binding upon the party to

perform his promise, though some vows have been rashly made, as in the case of Jephtha and of Peter.

The same law may not be as binding upon us as upon the Jews; but where we take God's revealed will, both as to what we desire and what we promise, it cannot be improper to enter into a solemn engagement of this kind; and under some circumstances it may be one of the highest exercises of grace.

I. Observe the terms and conditions of Jacob's vow. "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace"—

In general, these terms and conditions agree with the divine *promises*, and so exemplify the power of faith. We may pray submissively for things not expressly promised, as Abraham did for Sodom, and David for the life of his child; but when founded upon promise, there is much greater encouragement; for if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us. 1 John v. 14. Such is the case when a sinner repents, and prays for mercy in the Redeemer's name; also when we pray for the success of the gospel, and for such temporal blessings as shall be best for us.

The *order* of things in Jacob's vow is such as corresponds with our Lord's direction, of seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and when this order is preserved, we need not fear but all things will be added to us.

More particularly—

1. His leading request is, *that God would be with him.* This is expressive of God's favour being towards him, and giving him good success, as in the case of Abraham, Isaac, and many others. Gen. xxi. 22. xxvi. 28. This is of great importance to us, in the way we go through life. What are we in all our labours and pursuits, without God; or what, in all our tribulations? Jacob afterwards felt the advantage of God's being with him, in a time of trial; and we also are surrounded with a host of enemies. Gen. xxxi. 42.

2. He prays *that God would keep him in the way he was going.* Two important particulars are implied in this. One is, that his way was right, or he could not expect the presence of such a guide. It is of great consequence to us that we are found in the path of duty, or our prayer will be a sin. Another thing is, that we are in danger of going wrong, and of suffering wrong when we are in a right path, and therefore need a protector and a guide. Jacob's prayer will not apply to any other than a right way, and to such only as feel the need of divine direction.

3. That God would give him *bread to eat and raiment to put on.* Jacob only asks for what is absolutely necessary, food and raiment; and having this it becomes us to be content. 1 Tim. vi. 8. The flesh may desire more, and God may give us more, but we are not allowed to ask for more. The inspired petition is, 'Give us this day our daily bread.'

4. That he might *come again to his father's house in peace.* It is supposed that he would come again, as the Lord had promised, ver. 15: but his great desire was that he might come in peace. What more desirable than to be blessed in our going out and in our coming in; to be preserved on our journeys, and brought home in peace. Psal. cxxi. 7, 8.

II. The vow itself: "Then shall the Lord be my God."

This expresses Jacob's decided choice, and includes the total renunciation of idols. In taking the Lord to be his God, he fulfilled what was afterwards written in the commandment: 'Thou shalt have no other gods besides me.'

1. Jacob's vow illustrates the nature of *true conversion*, and probably this was the time of the patriarch's conversion, when he so solemnly pledged himself to the God of his fathers. For is conversion, but taking the Lord to be our God: renouncing every other portion, and placing all our hopes in him. Psal. xvi. 2. Isai. xxvi. 13.

2 Having entered into such solemn vows, may teach us *the necessity of reviewing them* on many occasions, and of looking back to the time and circumstances in which we engaged to be the Lord's. Jacob remembered his vow long afterwards, and went up to worship at Bethel, where the vow was made. Gen. xxxv. 1—3. For us also to remember our first love, zeal, and tenderness of conscience, will help to rekindle our former feelings, and make us know that the vows of God are upon us. Jer. ii. 2, 3. Let us go up to Bethel, as Jacob did, and 'dwell there.'

Let it serve for self-examination, that if the Lord be our God, his will is our law, his glory is our end, and himself will be our portion.

PERPETUITY OF THE CHURCH OF GOD.

Rejoice not against me, oh mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise: when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me—Micah vii. 8.

Micah was contemporary with Isaiah, and prophesied about a hundred and fifty years before the captivity; but though the event was so distant he foretold it, as Isaiah did, and also its termination.

The prophet in the text personates the Church, and anticipates what would be her language during the captivity. Three things are here supposed—

(1) That the church would have a "fall," and for a time would "sit in darkness." Babylon would cast her down, and shut her up as it were in prison. Psal. cvii. 10—12.

(2) That when this should come to pass, her "enemy would rejoice," and triumph over her. Thus it was with Edom, with Babylon, and many others. Psal. cxxxvii. 7—9. Zeph. ii. 8—10.

(3) Though she should fall, it would not be to rise no more; and

though she should sit in darkness, "the Lord would be a light unto her." This was fulfilled in the time of Cyrus: hence she is described as looking at her enemies, and fortelling their confusion, ver. 9, 10.

Such appears to be the general meaning of this prophecy; and from it we may learn, That the church of God, though encompassed with opposition, and subject to many evils in this world, will live and outlive all her enemies.

I. Consider the Church of God as encompassed with adversaries in all ages, and subject to many evils in the present world.

From the very beginning, when God revealed his design of having a church in the world, it was intimated that it would meet with great opposition, but the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. Thus it has been in all ages, and we have seen it exemplified to the present time. The carnal mind has always been at enmity with God, and those who are born after the flesh have always persecuted those who are born after the Spirit. Gal. iv. 29.

1. The church of God under *the patriarchal age* was encompassed with enemies, and had to encounter various kinds of opposition. First as individuals, they were attacked by assassination in the person of Abel, whom Cain slew. Then in society, as 'the sons of God,' they were surrounded with corruption, which abounded on every side. Gen. vi. 1—4. Afterwards as families, they were exposed to scoffers, and to the opposition of the unbelieving part of their own households. Ishmael mocked Isaac, and Esau hated Jacob.

2. During the existence of *the Jewish church*, the same kind of hostility prevailed in different forms. When the Israelites began to increase and multiply in Egypt, they were oppressed; and when they afterwards became a nation, they were as a burdensome stone for all people. Zech. xii. 3. Edom and Moab, Babylon and Tyre, were continually seeking the destruction of Israel, and Zion was the object of their bitterest enmity.

3. The church of God under *the new testament* especially, is surrounded with enemies, and the gates of hell have tried to prevail against it. During the first three hundred years the christian church was persecuted by the civil power, under the form of paganism; and in later periods, by the papal antichrist. But now we may sing as David did, saying, Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped. Psal. cxxiv. 6, 7.

4. The opposition to which the church of God is exposed, is *not from men only*, for they are Satan's agents, and he is to be considered as the grand adversary. It is the seed of the serpent, with the serpent at their head; the dragon and his army. Rev. xii. 13—17. There are seasons indeed in which the enemy seems to be at rest, but in reality it is not so. When the power of persecution is restrained, he works the more by silently corrupting the church of God, in principle and in practice. This was the case in the time of Constantine, when the church was fostered by and brought into alliance with the state; and it is the

same in our day. The gospel is debased by error, and the worship of God adulterated with human inventions. Matt. xv. 9.

II. Observe how the church of God has lived through it all, and shall outlive all her enemies.

1. All other kingdoms are *doomed to fall, and to rise no more*, but God's kingdom shall stand for ever. Egypt and Edom, those ancient enemies of the church, where are they? They said of Jerusalem Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation: but they themselves have been rased from the earth. Israel saw them buried, and Israel survives. Babylon, where is now that mighty city? Zion witnessed her downfall, and her kingdom was numbered and finished: but Zion still lives, and shall live for ever. Psal. ix. 6, 7.

2. Every thing *external to the church* shall fall to rise no more, and yet the church itself shall live. The city of Jerusalem, which was once her residence, and the temple, where her worship was celebrated, are gone, but Zion still remains. The nation of the Jews, God's peculiar people, are broken and scattered: yet the church is still preserved, and God has visited the gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

3. The church has sometimes been reduced to so low a state, as almost to *threaten its extinction;* and yet it has always been raised from its ruins, and established with greater strength. This was the case in some of the persecutions during the three first centuries of the christian era; they thought that they had wholly suppressed the sect of the Nazarenes; and yet a seed was left, which increased and multiplied the more it was oppressed, like the people of Israel in Egypt. A little before the reformation from popery, Zion was covered with a cloud of darkness, and yet the Lord was a light unto her; and while all the world wondered after the beast there were a few that followed the lamb.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) If the church of God is safe, in the midst of all her enemies, so is *every individual* member of it; for what is true of the whole, must also be true of every part. As individuals we have not only to wrestle with flesh and blood, but also with principalities and powers, and we must go up through great tribulation; but every one whose face is Zionward may adopt the triumphant language of the text, and bid defiance to all their enemies. Though they fall into various *afflictions*, they shall not perish in them. They shall not be as Saul, but as David, who waxed stronger and stronger. Though they fall into divers *temptations*, yet shall they arise; and this it is that distinguishes the character of real saints. Saul and Judas fell, and rose no more. David and Peter also fell, and their enemies rejoiced over them; but they rose again, and became strong in the Lord. If believers fall into sin, they cannot lie easy in that state, but will pray to be delivered.

(2) We see that it is of unspeakable importance *what side we take;* whether we are such as rejoice in Zion's downfall, or in her prosperity.

All wicked men are glad at the falls of the godly, and take pleasure in reproaching them for their faults; but it is not so with the friends of God. True benevolence rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth. 1 Cor. xxiii. 6.

THE PAINFUL RETROSPECT.

Oh that I were as in months past!—Job xxix. 2.

In the depths of affliction and misery, it was natural for Job to look back on better days, when he lived in ease and prosperity. It was also natural for him to wish the return of these happy seasons: yet it is not well in times of adversity to pore too much on past enjoyments, as it only tends to increase our present bitterness.

This was not all however that Job felt; he refers as well to that happy state of soul which he formerly enjoyed. Amidst his outward prosperity he had possessed a good degree of spirituality, and maintained a holy and familiar intercourse with God: but this he seems to have lost during his affliction, ver. 5. The loss of this inestimable privilege he bitterly deplores, at an other period of his affliction, he lays it much to heart, xxiii. 3. 4.

We may apply the text to ourselves, and see whether we have not too much reason to utter the same wish.

I. Let us call to remembrance some of the best seasons of our lives, and see how it was with us formerly.

The recollection of former times may be of use to us in several respects; it may tend to encourage us, Psal. xlii. 6; to promote conviction and abasement, Rev. ii. 3; to revive those feelings we formerly possessed, and kindle a desire for their return.

There are in particular two periods which it will be good for us to remember; the time when we first began to seek the Lord, and those seasons in which we have met with heavy trials.

1. Let us call to remembrance *the time when we first knew the Lord*, and found that he was gracious; the day of our espousals, when we went after him in the wilderness. Jer. ii. 2. Surely we can never forget the time when we first set our faces Zion-ward, when he led us with weeping and supplication. Jer. 1. 5. These first operations of grace make a strong impression on the heart. Jacob could never forget Bethel, nor Paul his journey to Damascus. The primitive christians could never forget those happy days, when they were all of one heart and of one soul; nor can we forget the time when we were born as it were into a new world, when the bible seemed as a new book, when the society of the godly was resorted to with delight, when the return of the Sabbath was ardently desired, and every holy duty esteemed an inestimable privilege.

2. Call to remembrance *those seasons in which we have met with heavy trials.* The pleasures of true piety are great at first, but not confined to that period. Our own experience will probably attest, that some of our best seasons have been those in which we have met with great troubles; for God who comforteth those that are cast down, generally reserves some of the greatest mercies for such seasons. If we have met with persecution or reproach for Christ's sake, it was attended with a deeper sense of our love to him. Some of David's best times were when he fled from Saul, and was driven into the wilderness. Bereaving providences have also been mixed with tender mercy, and we could never have relished the promises of God as we have done, but for some such trials. Then indeed we have found that 'the Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble.' After we have had discoveries of the plague of our own hearts, and the corruption of our nature, oh how great has the love of Christ appeared towards us. After we have fallen into temptation, and been recovered from it, how sweet has been the renewal of the divine friendship! On reviewing these seasons of spiritual refreshment, we can scarcely refrain from saying with Job, "Oh that it were with me as in months past!"

II. Enquire into the causes why it is not with many of us as it has been in former times.

No doubt but in all our inward as well as outward changes there is a mixture of divine sovereignty, though Job's friends seemed to have overlooked this in their accusations of him; and in the abundance of their charity they considered all his afflictions as the fruit of sin, though this conclusion was evidently unjust. Nevertheless it is true, that our iniquities have often separated between God and us; and even Job enquired, 'Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me.'

But if our religious enjoyments have declined, let us enquire a little into the reasons of it—

1. Do we cordially love and *live upon the truths of the gospel*, as much as in times past? If not, it will account for the decline of our spiritual comfort. The doctrines of the gospel are the food of the soul, if we neglect them, we shall be sure to suffer loss. They are the living bread, and a well of living water, springing up into everlasting life.

2. Are we equally attentive to *the duties of religion*, as in times past; or have the cares of the world swallowed up all our thoughts? How many that were devoted to God in early life, have afterwards been surfeited with the cares of life, and left their first love. They then begin to neglect private duties, and lose all relish for those holy exercises in which they once found their chief delight. No wonder then, if it be not with them as in months past.

3. Are we as *watchful against temptation*, as formerly? If not, this will account for the decay of our comforts, by preventing the success of our prayers. If we indulge in envy and discontent, in pride, the love of riches, or in sensual lusts, God will have a controversy with us, and there will be no solid peace or comfort until this Jonah is cast out.

III. Observe the consequences of remaining in a declining state, and how desirable it is to have our spiritual strength and comfort renewed.

1. We shall otherwise attend upon *religious duties* to very little purpose, and shall find no satisfaction in them. Whatever of earthly good we may enjoy, it will be nothing to us without God.

2. We shall be in the utmost danger in every hour of *temptation.* We are weak and helpless at best; but if God withdraws his presence and support, we fall an easy prey to every temptation. See how it was with Peter and with Hezekiah.

3. If found in a declining state, what shall we do in the day of *adversity*, and in the hour of *death?* We shall then need all the succours and all the comforts of true religion; and nothing but nearness to God, and a life of communion with him, can prepare us for, or sustain us in such a time of trial.

If past enjoyments are so desirable, and the recollection of them be attended with feelings of tender regret; what will the future be, where all our pleasures will be perpetual, and unattended with any alloy!

GOD'S COUNSEL TO THE AFFLICTED.

I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly.—Psalm lxxxv. 8.

This psalm appears to have been written after the captivity: it celebrates the return of Judah to her own land, and intercedes for those who are still left behind. The writer assumes the attitude of the watchman upon his tower, looking for good tidings; and hopes from God's usual kindness to his people, that he shall not wait in vain.

I. Notice the resolution formed: "I will hear what God the Lord will speak."

In times of trouble there are many speakers, many who offer their gratuitous advice, and we are apt to listen to what one and another says; but let us remember that at such seasons God also speaks, and it is better to listen to him. While the two blind men were sitting by the wayside, they heard that Jesus passed by, and began immediately to cry to him. The multitude rebuked them, but they regarded it not; they would listen only to the voice of Jesus. Let us do likewise.

God may be said to speak to us in two ways in times of trouble; by the troubles themselves, and by his word under them. Troubles themselves are God's voice, whether to a people or to individuals. 1 Kings xvii. 18. Isai. xxii. 12. Mic. vi. 9. When God lays his hand

upon us, or upon those who are dear to us, it is a call to self-reflection and humiliation before him. We may have made too much or too little of the mercies that are taken from us, and we may alternately have done both. But that which more especially requires attention is the voice of God's word, under the various ills and trials of life.

1. If labouring under *a sense of guilt and unworthiness*, and enquiring what we must do to be saved; let us hear what God the Lord speaks to us in his word. The world indeed may say there is no need of this; conscience on the other hand may read your doom, and say there is no hope. Despair may say, as in the case of Jonah, I am cast out of thy sight. Self-righteous hope may say, leave off your open sins, reform your conduct, do as well as you can, and all will be right. But what does God say? Hear ye him, inviting you to the Saviour, and commanding you to trust in him alone; and see that you rest in nothing short of him. Matt. xi. 28. John iii. 16, 36.

2. Does your sorrow arise from *outward affliction?* Is the Lord's hand laid upon you in a way of sickness, or in the loss of some earthly good, in which you had found gread delight? Your feelings may possibly say with Jacob, What good shall my life do unto me! Dejection and melancholy may say, I shall go mourning to my grave, for my hope is perished from the Lord. But what does the Lord say in this affliction? Be still and know that I am God. Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me. Psal. l. 15. xci. 15. 1 Pet. v. 6.

3. Does it arise from *depressing circumstances*, and a succession of adverse providences, bringing losses and poverty in their train? In such a case many voices will be heard, and much advice be offered; many anxious cares and painful apprehensions will arise. Still it is best to hear what God the Lord will speak; and his advice is, In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy steps: trust in the Lord and do good, and verily thou shalt be fed: he shall supply all our need, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. Psal. xxxvii. 3—5. lxxxiv. 11. Phil. iv. 19. Heb. xiii. 5. 1 Pet. v. 7.

4. The Lord sometimes contends with *his people collectively*, as well as with individuals, by removing useful characters from among them, or by withholding his blessing from the means of grace. In such cases it is good to hear his voice saying, I have laid help upon one that is mighty, and the government shall be upon his shoulders. By whom shall Jacob arise when he is small, but by the mighty God of Jacob. Psal. lxxxix. 19. Isai. ix. 6. li. 1—3. Zech. iv. 6, 7.

II. The ground of the psalmist's resolution: "for he will speak peace unto his people and to his saints."

The term "people" may be taken collectively, and "saints" individually; and so the words are applicable to both. The term people also conveys the idea of a covenant, for God has no people in this apostate world, but those who are such by the covenant. Israel were the Lord's people, being the children of Abraham, and afterwards taken into covenant at mount Sinia. Believers in Christ are also the Lord's people,

taken into covenant with him, who is the head of the mystical body. Ephes. i. 3, 4.

To such he "speaks peace," and to his saints individually; but there is no peace to the impenitent and unbelieving. The Scriptures are full of good words and comfortable words to God's people, under all the troubles and ills of life, and even when they have sinned against him, if they return to him with all the heart. Jer. iii. 22. iv. 1. Hos. xiv. 1, 4. Judah had grievously offended, and was cast out of his sight; but now that the Lord had brought back the captivity of Jacob, he forgave their iniquity, and covered all their sin: ver. 1, 2.

III. The caution given when the mercy is obtained: "let them not turn again to folly."

Sin is here termed "folly:" it is contrary to our own interest, and committed against our own souls; it is not only offensive to God, but ruinous and destructive to the sinner.

1. The caution in the text very well applies to *the awakened sinner*, who has found peace to his soul through the blood of the cross. God has forgiven you all trespasses: go and sin no more.

2. It applies to the case of *a backslider*, who has returned and found mercy: "let him not turn again to folly." Beware of going astray, you are not out of the reach of danger, you are still in the body, and have still an evil heart of unbelief, ready to depart from the living God.

3. It is not inapplicable to the case of such as have been *afflicted*, and again *restored* to health and peace. If God remove his hand from you, and life is spared, sin no more, lest a worse thing happen unto thee. Be now the Lord's, and let his vows be upon you. Psal. lvi. 12, 13. lxvi. 13, 14.

It is the design of all God's mercy towards us to embitter sin to us, whether he pardons or restores; and he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities. Psal. cxxx. 8.

CONVERSION OF THE JAILOR.

Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas; and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God, with all his house.—Acts xvi. 29—34.

The history of Paul's visiting Philippi is highly interesting. All parties appeared to be in earnest, the apostles in preaching the gospel, Satan

and his agents in opposing it, and the city was 'exceedingly troubled.' The magistrates and the people were active, and the jailor performed his part to the utmost. The Lord himself was interested in the matter; he supported the apostles, furnished them with a song of praise, and caused an earthquake in the dead of night, which shook the foundations of the prison, and of Satan's kingdom also.

All was now confusion; the poor jailor is about to commit suicide, fearing that his prisoners had escaped. Paul relieves his apprehensions on that head, and now another trouble ensues, ver. 29. A new set of fears arrest the jailor, he sees the hand of God in these events, trembles at his situation, falls down before the apostles, and cries for mercy.

Let us now offer a few remarks on the question which the jailor puts to the apostles, their answer to his enquiry, and the happy issue of all.

I. The question put to the apostles: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

1. This implies a *consciousness*, even in the mind of a heathen, of *a certain truth*, namely, that he had a soul to be saved or lost; that he was a sinner, and must shortly give account of himself to God. These truths, while he was at ease, had little or no effect upon him; but in the time of an earthquake they are realized, and deeply impressed upon his heart. This is often the case with careless and thoughtless sinners, and even with scorners and infidels.

2. The enquiry so eagerly proposed implies, that on the near approach of death, all those concerns which have hitherto engaged our attention, *will be lost in this one question*, What must I do to be saved? What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or who will show us any good, are the anxious enquiries of men in general: but in a dying hour, if conscious of our moral condition, salvation will be all our concern. Oh that it were all our enquiry now! For though the Philippian jailor found mercy, yet many are swept away by sudden death without it, and hurried into an eternal world. Luke xii. 20.

3. The *question itself is of unspeakable importance*. Whether we consider the depth of our guilt and danger, the immortality of the soul, the intolerable nature of divine wrath, or that the present life is the only time of obtaining mercy, it is impossible to conceive of a question equally interesting and important. Matt. xvi. 26.

4. The question was proposed *to the proper persons*, the apostles of our Lord and Saviour. Heathen philosophers with all their wisdom could not answer it, neither could the Jewish doctors. 1 Cor. i. 21—23. To as little purpose might we apply to multitudes of nominal christians, and professed teachers of christianity. None but those entrusted with the gospel, and who are the servants of the most High God, can show unto men the way of salvation. Acts xvi. 17.

5. The question was proposed *in a becoming manner*, accompanied with tokens of reverence and respect. The jailor prostrated himself before Paul and Silas, brought them out of prison, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? His words and actions testified the altered state of his mind, and how he felt towards those who till now had been his prisoners.

II. The answer given to the enquiry by the apostles. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

1. Observe *its import.* That the enquirer was in a lost state, that he could be saved by no doings of his own, that a way of salvation was provided by the death of Christ, and that it was his interest and his duty immediately to acquiesce. This is still the message of the gospel to all, to whom it is addressed. Many indeed imagine that they do believe, but the faith of men in general is merely traditional, in the same manner as the Jews pretended to believe in Moses, even while they rejected Christ.

2. The *promptness* of the reply. Here is nothing circuitous, nothing doubtful, like what the wisdom of men would have suggested; all is prompt and explicit. Christ's ministers have their errand before them, and his salvation is adapted to the utmost extremity of the miserable and the lost. The remedy is quite at hand, and the word is nigh thee; even in thy mouth, and in thy heart. Isai. xlvi. 13. Rom. x. 8.

3. The *sufficiency* of the reply, to answer every purpose of the enquirer. Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ secures peace of conscience, in the pardon of sin; reconciliation with God, purity of heart, and a devotedness to his service and glory. Rom. v. 1. Acts xv. 9.

III. The happy issue of all, in the conversion of the jailor and his family.

1. He appears to have requested *farther information,* in addition to what was summarily contained in the apostles' answer; for they afterwards "spake unto him the word of the Lord," ver. 32. He would naturally enquire who Christ was, that he might believe on him; also what the Lord required him to do, and how he might serve him.

2. As the messages were addressed *to him, and to his house,* ver. 31: so we find that he collected his family together to hear the word, ver. 32. This shews in what way an awakened sinner will begin to use his influence, and the concern he feels in the good of others. John i. 41—45.

3. The jailor and his family *all believe the word,* and receive the truth in love, ver. 34. What a blessed change, and what a blessed family, all rejoicing together in God's salvation!

4. He did what he could to *atone for his cruelty* towards Paul and Silas, ver. 33. He took them out of prison and washed their stripes: oh what a mixture of feelings was here!

5. The jailor and his family the same hour *were baptized,* in token of their subjection to Christ's authority .There was a promptness in this obedience, corresponding with the decisive nature of the apostles' doctrine; it was done "straightway," without reluctance or hesitation. The jailor and his family are now classed among the followers of Jesus, fearless of the opposition they in their turn might have to encounter, from the populace and the magistrates of Philippi.

6. Having been baptized, not in the house, but elsewhere, the happy

convert introduces the apostles to his dwelling, and entertains them with *hospitality*, ver. 34; rejoicing also, and believing in God, with all his house. This was a day never to be forgotten.

FEARFUL END OF GOD'S ENEMIES.

Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish in the presence of God.—Psalm lxviii. 1, 2.

This psalm was written on occasion of bringing up the ark of God from the house of Obededom; and as it ascended to the holy city, this triumphant song was sung, as in the times of Moses. 1 Chron. xv. 25—28. Num. x. 35. It breathes the language of defiance, and shows what must be, what ought to be, the fate of all the enemies of God.

I. Enquire wherein it appears that wicked men are in reality God's enemies.

All sin is opposite to the very nature of God, and wherever it prevails it makes men his enemies. Some are wholly under its influence, and they therefore become its open and decided enemies.

1. This appears more especially in a universal *rejection of his government.* In setting up our own will as the rule of action, serving divers lusts and pleasures, and living without God in the world. This is the temper of all wicked men; and if in any instance they do what appears to be right, it is not in obedience to the will of God, nor because they are commanded to do it, but because they happen to be so inclined. In all this there is a total dereliction of divine authority. Zech. vii. 5, 6.

2. It appears in habitual *dissatisfaction with God's providence*, wanting to have the reins of government and the disposal of events in our own hands. What a deal of enmity is discovered here, especially in two things. If events are favourable, men ascribe it to themselves; their own wisdom and their own might have done it. When evils happen to befal, there is a disposition to lay the blame of it upon God, or impute it the malignity of fate. In every way God is contemned, and his authority despised.

3. It appears in a *disrelish of God's moral perfections.* Many who profess to admire the natural perfections of God as they appear in the works of creation, and to be greatly delighted with them, are at the same time utterly averse to those attributes in which the true glory of the divine character consists. They love to contemplate what is great and powerful, but dislike the holy and the just: but such a state of heart is wholly alienate from God.

4. Enmity is discovered in a *rejection of divine revelation.* Some entirely discard it, and endeavour to pour contempt upon it. Others who profess to receive it, reject at the same time some of its leading doctrines, and so in effect invalidate the whole. Hence it comes to pass that the divine law is looked upon with an evil eye, as too strict in its requirements, or too severe in its denunciations, and is even regarded as an Egyptian task-master. Hence also the gospel is subverted, its principal truths denied, or accommodated to men's corrupt propensities. Enmity always shows itself in an aversion to God's way of salvation, going about to establish our own righteousness, and not being willing to submit to the righteousness of God.

5. In a secret *dislike to the friends of God*, and opposition to his cause. In this it often appears, even while other things are tolerably fair. It shows itself in a wish to reproach the character, misrepresent the principles and conduct of religious people; to speak ill of religion in general, and where power is possessed to use it in hindering the work of the Lord. It is Satan's employment to blind the minds of them that believe not, and in this also his servants are engaged. 2 Cor. iv. 4.

Yet in many instances those who are the subjects of this enmity, seem not to be aware of it. This perhaps is chiefly owing to their having false notions of God, and because they are not always under such temptations as call forth this enmity into direct exercise. Saul of Tarsus did not think himself an enemy to God, when he was persecuting the saints, and haling them to prison; on the contrary, he reckoned that he was doing God service. Acts xxvi. 9, 10.

II. Consider the great evil contained in this enmity of heart to God.

How came the Lord to have any enemies among the human race? What evil hath he done, or wherein hath he deserved this at our hands? Surely this must be utterly inexcusable. Mic. vi. 3.

1. To be averse to God as *the Lawgiver*, is to be an enemy to the order and happiness of the universe. God forbids nothing but what is evil, requires nothing but what is just and good; obedience to the one would prevent our ruin, and to the other would ensure our happiness. To be God's enemy therefore, is to be the enemy of all righteousness.

2. To be averse to *the providence of God*, or to his management and superintendence, is to be an enemy to the well-being of mankind. If infinite wisdom and goodness direct every concern, the direction cannot be in better hands. And shall God abandon all his plans, and the earth be forsaken for us! Job xviii. 4.

3. To be *averse to the gospel*, or to God as the Saviour, is to be an enemy to our own souls, to our dearest interests, and those of others. It is to be at war with infinite love itself, and with our own immortal happiness. Prov. viii. 36.

III. Consider how vain and how dangerous it is to attempt to oppose God, and to become his enemy.

" God will arise, and his enemies must be scattered: they that hate him shall flee before him." See to what such weak and arrogant creatures are compared, ver. 2: to " smoke before the wind, and wax before the fire." So shall they melt away before the presence of God. They are not melted into repentance for their unreasonable enmity, but are utterly consumed with terrors. All their stoutness of heart and vain confidence shall fail them, when God rises up to meet them, whether it be at death, or in the day of judgment. However men may seem now to brave it out, while God stands at a distance; yet when he comes near to them in judgment, their hearts will fail them. Like the smoke will they be driven, and like the wax will they be consumed.

(1) Learn how awful is the state of the unconverted, enemies to God, and doomed to everlasting destruction.

(2) If we desire to be at peace with God, the way is prepared. He can be reconciled through his Son, and be pacified towards us for all our offences. Ezek. xvi. 63.

(3) How great and wonderful is the love of Christ, in dying for us while we were enemies by wicked works. Rom. v. 8—10.

(4) What cause to admire the grace of the Holy Spirit, in turning our hearts, and melting us into love.

LOVE TO CHRIST THE TEST OF TRUE RELIGION.

He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.—John xxi. 16.

When we recollect the conduct of Peter in denying his Lord, the nature and magnitude of his offence, and how highly it was aggravated by attendant circumstances, we cannot but feel particularly interested in knowing how it would fare with him on the next interview with his blessed Lord; and it is to the gospel of John that we are indebted for this valuable piece of history.

The text with its connection states precisely what was the conduct of Jesus towards him, after his resurrection. It is true, this was not the first interview, for it was the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead: ver. 14. The Lord also had appeared unto Simon, on the very day of his resurrection. Luke xxiv. 34. But it does not appear that any thing was said on the subject of his fall, till this third public interview. Peter had wept bitterly for his sin, and had joined himself to the disciples; yet what could he expect, but to meet with a severe reproof. Let us therefore notice,

I. The conduct of Jesus towards Simon Peter.

1. Observe the *indirect manner* in which the reproof is given.

Nothing is said immediately on the subject, and no mention is made of his having denied the Lord; for Christ had seen his tears, and was come to heal him. There is indeed a glance at his misconduct, and though it is only a glance, Peter perceives it, and feels it too; but no name is given to the offence. Oh what love and tenderness is here, and how different from all that is known among the best of men! Peter had reproached himself, and therefore Jesus would not do it, but deals with him as a friend. It may be doubtful whether there would have been so much as an allusion to what was past, had it not been for the sake of example, and as a lesson to the rest of the disciples.

2. *The question* that is put to him by our Lord: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" This would go deep into Peter's heart, for it would seem as if his love to Christ must now be called in question, and nothing could be more painful to an ingenuous mind than this. Peter had wept, and returned to the disciples; but none of these things would do, without the most unequivocal proof of love to Christ. He is also called by his old name, "Simon, son of Jonas," as if he was not now to be reckoned among the disciples of his Lord. What a mixture of goodness and severity is here!

3. The *comparative form* in which the question is proposed in the first instance: Lovest thou me "more than these? Peter could not forget his saying, Though all men should deny thee, yet will not I: yet where now is the proof? Did any of his brethren act so unfaithful a part as himself? He alone was guilty of treachery and deceit: and how distressing now must be the recollection of his former confidence, and the vaunting assurance he had given.

4. The *repetition* of the question is another painful circumstance, and must deeply have affected the mind of the apostle. Thrice had Peter denied the Lord, and thrice is the question asked, Lovest thou me? Peter was "grieved" at this, and well he might; but it was intended to call to remembrance the aggravated nature of his offence. A recollection of past sins, though pardoned, cannot fail to renew the sorrow of a real penitent, who will be ready to say with David, My sin is ever before me.

5. There is *great mercy* mixed with this seeming severity. The question was repeatedly proposed, it is true, and as often answered; but still nothing is said about Peter's sin, and no words of reproach are uttered. Moreover, the Lord Jesus accepted his avowal, and repeatedly committed to him the care of his flock, saying "Feed my sheep, feed my lambs." This was in effect a renewal of his commission, which conveyed an assurance of forgiveness, and that he was now accepted in the presence of all his brethren.

6. We cannot but notice *Peter's answer* to these interrogations. It was marked with becoming humility, for when asked whether he loved the Saviour "more" than others, or more than his brethren had done, he declined the affirmative, and was content simply to declare his attachment, without assuming any thing like his former self-confidence. There was at the same time a great deal of fervour in his reply; the question being three times proposed, he as often repeated the as-

surance of his love, and appealed to Jesus for the truth and sincerity of his declaration.

Applying the subject to ourselves, we shall notice,

II. The importance of the question which Jesus proposed: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?"

This is an enquiry that nearly concerns us all, and carries in it the most serious and important consequences—

1. On the answer to this question depends *the truth and reality of our religion.* The love of Christ implies that we are the subjects of repentance, faith, and every other spiritual disposition. All our prayers and tears, all our hopes and joys, all our knowledge and obedience, are nothing without this; the love of Christ is the source and the centre of every other holy affection. The prophets and apostles, the saints of all ages, have been distinguished by their love to Christ, and making him the object of supreme regard. Abraham rejoiced to see his day, David describes him as fairer than the children of men, Isaiah saw his glory and spake of him, and Paul counted all things but loss for his sake. The church of old exulted in him, as the chiefest among ten thousand and altogether lovely, and to every one who believes he is precious. Some indeed have pretended to love God, who have not been the friends of Christ, and whose hearts never glowed with love to him. The unbelieving Jews did this, and alleged that God was their father, while they disowned his only-begotten Son; but the answer of Jesus was, 'If God were your father, ye would love me.' Deists also pretend to venerate the Supreme Being, while they refuse the record that God hath given of his Son. Semi-deists likewise, under the christian name, profess to be the friends of God and of divine revelation, while they consider Christ as a mere creature, and of course not entitled to supreme affection. But let men deceive themselves as they may, the Scriptures claim the same honour and affection for the Son as for the Father, and have left all his enemies under the curse. John v. 23. 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

2. On this question depends all the *comfort and enjoyment of religion.* It is the love of Christ that makes holy duties delightful, 2. Cor. v. 13, 14: they would otherwise be dull and uninteresting, and we should go on heavily in them. Mark the spiritual condition of those worshipping assemblies where this principle is discarded or unknown; and what are they, but a valley of dry bones. What also is the state of individual believers, where the love of Christ is wanting, or is suffered to decline. Religious privileges without this will be lightly regarded, and will soon be loathed like the manna in the wilderness. Christian fellowship and holy ordinances would degenerate into mere formality, and be deprived of all that satisfaction they were intended to impart. The gospel itself would be nothing to us without the love of Christ; we should see none of its glory, nor be able to rejoice in its salvation. It would then become a matter of cold speculation only, or its leading doctrines would be rejected. The promises, though

exceeding great and precious, would have no preciousness in them, for they are full of Christ, and he is the sum and substance of them all. 2 Cor. i. 20. Ephes. i. 3. Heaven itself could be no heaven to us without the love of Christ, for that is the all-inspiring principle of the world of bliss. No fitness could we possess for any of its exercises or enjoyments, for Christ is the burden of their song, and the object of their adoration. Rev. v. 11—14.

3. On this question depends our *fitness for the service of God on earth.* The love of Christ is that which prepares and disposes us to serve him, nor can we be of much use to our families, in the church of God, or in the world, without it. The form of religion and outward decency may be preserved, but a savour of the name of Christ can never be diffused, where the heart is cold and indifferent towards him. A warm heart for Christ is the great qualification for the christian ministry, as is evident from the conduct of our Lord towards Peter, for he would not commit the flock to his care till he had ascertained the strength and fervour of his affection; and then he said to him, "Feed my sheep, feed my lambs." All the rest are hirelings, whose the sheep are not, or who have received no commission from the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls. John x. 12, 13. It is this qualification, rather than learning or great abilities, that fits a minister for his work; and men of this description are generally more successful than any other. Without love to Christ we shall have no love to souls, no compassion for the ignorant and them that are out of the way, no heart to seek after the lost sheep, no desire or ability to furnish them with proper food and pasture. Ezek. xxxiv. 1—6. And if love to Christ be so essential to the work of the ministry, then how miserably are those men employed, who labour to damp and destroy the ardour of our love by robbing Christ of his dignity and glory, and representing him as a creature like ourselves. Better were it to leave the altar, than to profane it with such abominations.

III. The various ways in which this question is put home to our own hearts.

1. By *persecution and reproach,* Jesus seems to say to us, Lovest thou me? That is a time that tries our attachment, and whether we can suffer for his sake. The love of many has been submitted to this test, and they have not counted their lives dear unto them.

2. By *temptation* this question is often put to us, and the trial is severe. The temptations of Satan are attended with more danger than violent persecution, and sin has done that for the followers of Christ which suffering could never accomplish. But when tempted by the evils that are in the world, and in our own hearts, can we deny ourselves for his sake, and take up our cross and follow him?

3. Christ tries our love by *worldly losses* and disappointments. It is easy to profess his name, when not in danger of suffering any material inconvenience by it; but if it should happen that we must lose our friends, give up our worldly prospects and advantages, or relinquish our attachment to the Saviour, then is our religion brought to the test, and it will be seen whether we cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart.

4. Christ tries our love by *giving us his commandments to keep.* John xiv. 15. We may love Christ from the hope of being saved by him, but unless we keep his commandments, that hope is vain. Many of them are opposite to flesh and blood, and require the exercise of much self denial; but if we truly love Christ we shall not hesitate to do his will, and to walk in all his commandments and ordinances blameless. John xiv. 21.

5. By *committing his cause into our hands*, and leaving us in charge till he comes to reckon with his servants. Matt. xxv. 14, 15. If we truly love Christ we shall be faithful to the trust, shall neither neglect nor abandon his interest in the world, but say with David, If I forget thee, oh Jerusalem, let my right hand forget, and let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth. Happy shall we be to consecrate to him the first-fruits of our increase, to support his righteous cause, and spread abroad the savour of his name.

6. By committing to our care *the poor and needy of his flock.* These are his representatives; and when they present themselves he seems to say to us, Lovest thou me? We cannot be unmindful of their afflictions and necessities, without at the same time withholdiug the expression of our love to him; and by this proof of our attachment will our state be decided in the great day. Matt. xxv. 40. All his followers are distinguished by a spirit of genuine benevolence, nor will christianity assimilate with any other principle. 1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2.

DELIVERANCE FROM DEEP DISTRESS.

I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.—Psalm xl. 1—3.

Had it not been for the psalms of David, we should have known but little of the experience of good people in former times; but here we see that as in water, face answereth to face, so doth the heart of man to man; and that what the experience of saints was many hundreds of years ago, that it is now.

I. Consider the painful situation of the psalmist, sinking as it were into "a horrible pit, and into the miry clay."

It is difficult to say what were the peculiar circumstances of David, denoted by this metaphorical expression, though it is evident he laboured under deep distress, and was sinking into despondency. We know that

he was reduced to great extremities during the persecuting reign of Saul; help often failed, and sometimes his heart failed. We find also that he was the subject of much despondency under a sense of sin, and of divine chastisement. Psal. xxxviii. 1—4. This also appears to have been the case in the present instance, ver. 12; and there are but few christians who have not been exercised in a similar manner.

1. A sense of sin, *unaccompanied with a believing view of the mercy of God our Saviour*, will produce the despondency mentioned in the text. This is often the case in the earlier stages of the christian life, when the mind is intensely fixed on the multiplied aggravations of our guilt and nothing is seen and felt but our misery and wretchedness. When sin revives the sinner dies, and till the gospel comes to his relief he is without hope.

2. Doubts or *uncertainty about our being in a state of salvation*, will sometimes produce deep despondency. There are seasons in which the evidences of our adoption appear doubtful: look which way we will we have no lively remembrance of the past, no direct consciousness of the present, and but little hope of the future. These misgivings of heart are often the effect of guilt, through some particular temptation, or easily besetting sin; or they may arise from a course of spiritual declension. In either case the mind sinks into dejection, as into a horrible pit, or the miry clay.

3. *Dark and distressing providences* will often produce the same effect. We are so much influenced by sense, that what God appears to be by his dealings with us, that we imagine him to be in reality. If his hand be turned against us we soon begin to say, Surely against *me* is he turned. Though we may in general believe that all things work together for good to them that love God, yet while the dark cloud is over us we sink into the pit.

II. Observe the spirit and conduct of David, while in this situation.

He "cried" to the Lord, and "waited patiently" for an answer, ver. 1. We see here,

1. What a difference there is between *the conduct of the righteous and the wicked* in a time of trouble. Irreligious men sometimes find themselves in a horrible pit, but they call not upon the Lord; they seek some other remedy, and often in their own destruction. But good men have a better remedy for despair; they make the Most High their habitation, and their rock of defence. Jeremiah called upon the Lord out of the low dungeon, and Jonah out of the belly of hell.

2. *Calling upon the Lord* must be our refuge in the day of trouble. We may be compassed round about, but there is always one way of relief and of escape; we may look upward and find deliverance, when we have no where else to look. It was thus with Israel at the Red sea, and in the days of Jehoshaphat. 2 Chron. xx. 12.

3. We must not only cry, but *wait patiently for the Lord.* Patience we see does not consist in a feeling of indifference or unconcern about our state, or the issue of it; for it is accompanied with earnest crying to the Lord; but in bearing present ills without murmur-

ing, in a spirit of resignation to the will of God, and hoping in his mercy. Then whatever be the source of our present distress, it will issue well at last.

III. Noticé the process of David's deliverance.

1. The Lord "heard his cry." David could not know that till the answer came, and his petition was granted. God hears all that passes in a time of trouble, but he does not accept of all.

2. He "brought him out" of his dejected condition, whether arising from temporal or spiritual distress. If the former, it would be by giving a favourable turn to the affairs in a way of providence: if the latter by directing his mind to the hopes and promises of mercy: or by an interposition both of providence and grace.

3. He "set his feet upon a rock," and gave him to feel his ground, instead of sinking in the mire. Thus also the Lord directs the mourning sinner to the hopes of the gospel, where he finds firm footing, and a refuge from the wrath to come.

4. He "put a new song into his mouth," furnished him with fresh occasion for praise, and set his heart in order for it. Thus his mourning was turned into joy, and a garment of praise was given him for the spirit of heaviness.

5. The psalmist's deliverance when known, would afford encouragement to others: "many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord." Hearing of his distress would make them "fear," and hearing of his deliverance would encourage them to "trust." Such was the effect upon the righteous at that time, and such it has been ever sincé. The experience of David has been a source of relief and comfort to the church in all ages of the world.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) The experience of David in this instance is applicable to the case of a poor sinner, when first led to the hope of the gospel. He is in great distress, the Lord hears his cry, and brings him up from a state of despondency. Christ as revealed in the gospel is like a rock to his feet, his goings are established, and salvation by the blood of the cross furnishes him with a song of praise.

(2) The subject is equally applicable to the believer on various occasions, when delivered from spiritual darkness and despondency; in many a time of trouble when his soul is distressed, or when by providential interpositions some light is thrown upon his path. When poring over ills, or looking at them only with an eye of sense, we sink into despair; but when viewed by an eye of faith, we can see the wisdom and goodness of God in them. Let things be ever so dark, we may hope in God; and though we now sink into a horrible pit, we shall one day be brought out, and have a new song put into our mouths, even salvation to the Lord.

IMPORTANCE OF EXEMPLARY PIETY.

Among whom ye shine as lights in the world.—Philppians ii. 15.

The holy tendency of the gospel is one of the principal evidences of its divine original. It not only brings salvation, but teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. Paul could appeal to the conduct of primitive christians in proof of this, while he reminds them that by their exemplary piety they were to enlighten and adorn the age and country in which they lived.

I. Explain the exhortation, or show what it is to "shine as lights in the world."

It supposes a great distinction between christians and others, and especially that we be visibly distinguished from four sorts of characters. Those who are ashamed of their religion, and therefore endeavour to conceal it; those who, from a dread of singularity, conform to the present world; those who are selfish, and those who are churlish; for none of these can be said to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, under whatever form it may be professed.

1. If we are to shine as lights in the world, we must rigidly regard *those duties which are purely of a religious nature.* A regard to some things merely of a moral nature may procure us general esteem, but those more properly called religious will be likely to expose us to contempt. Much of true religion is indeed of a private nature, but not all of it. Christ requires us to confess his name before men; we must publicly avow his gospel, even those parts of it which are most offensive to the carnal mind; must adhere to his peculiar laws and ordinances, and all the directions given us to follow him. Family worship must also be regarded, teaching our children and our household the fear of the Lord. Some from shame, and some from other motives, neglect all these duties, and so are scarcely distinguished from the world around them.

2. To shine as lights in the world, regard must be had to *those things which relate to our conduct before men*, as well as before God. We must not be conformed to this world, but dare to be singular; must examine the customs of the world before we comply with them, for they are often evil when but little suspected. Those who draw serious persons into them, will reproach them afterwards when they have done it. We cannot shine as lights in the world without being singular, it would otherwise be no light at all; but it is impossible to be distinguished from the world, while our only care is to keep pace with it. Our religious character must exceed that of worldly men, however decent or respectable, or we cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Matt. v. 20. Luke vi. 32—38.

3. We must not merely be distinguished from others in our private devotions, and in the motives that govern our conduct, but *in those*

things especially which fall under the observation of mankind. The things that shine are righteousness, goodness, faithfulness and truth. 1 Sam. xii. 3. 2 Cor. i. 12. Ostentation should be avoided, yet our good works must be seen. Matt. v. 16. The good deeds of some men are all done in public, and others all in private; but there is a proper medium between these two extremes. 1 Thess. ii. 10.

4. We must pay a special regard to *relative duties*, as masters and servants, parents and children. A man is best known at home, and here it is that his light must shine. If his domestic character will not bear examination, and there be no savour of godliness about it, no one will be the better for his religion. Hence it is that David resolved to walk within his house with a perfect heart, and to suffer no evil to dwell with him, that he might be an example to all that were about him. Psal. ci. Gen. xviii. 19. Josh. xxiv. 15.

II. The motives by which the exhortation is enforced.

1. *Our conversation is more inspected* than we are apt to imagine Men are not so ignorant as not to know what it should be. They may care but little about our sentiments or experience, but their eye is fixed upon our conduct: we may cherish the hope that we are pardoned and justified, but they will judge whether we are sanctified or not. A child knows when its parent is kind and tender, and a servant when his master is what he ought to be. Men in general know when a person's dealings are open and honourable, and when not: and seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, the most exemplary deportment is demanded of us.

2. By the light we exhibit they will not only judge of us, but of *others connected with us*, and especially of our immediate associates. In the same way also they will judge of the professors of religion generally, concluding from one example that they are all alike. They will judge of religion itself in the same way, and even of its divine author. The glory of God therefore is materially affected by the practical representation we give of his government and grace.

3. If we exemplify the truth which we profess, our light may so shine into men's consciences, as to *produce a salutary conviction*, even where other lights have been disregarded. In some instances it has proved more effectual than preaching, and in none can it fail of producing some good effect. 1 Pet. iii. 1. Acts iv. 13. It is of the nature of light to make manifest, and the conviction that follows is often irresistible. The piety of Abel brought unwelcome reflections upon the mind of Cain, and the conduct of Noah was a practical condemnation of the world; but they were both of them faithful witnesses for God. 1 John 3. 12. Heb. xi. 7. In this way also we are commanded to reprove the unfruitful works of darkness. Ephes. v. 11.

4. It is one of the principal means of rendering *the ministry of the word effectual*, ver. 16. With what humble confidence may that faithful minister enter upon his work, whose doctrine is exemplified and confirmed by those who hear him, and who are his epistles of commendation, known and read of all men. 2 Cor. iii. 2. But little good is to

be expected, where this is not the case; and nothing tends more directly to counteract the efficacy of the gospel, than the unsanctified temper and disposition of its professors.

THE GOSPEL FEAST.

In this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, on wines of the lees well refined.—Isaiah xxv. 6.

Sacrificial or religious feasts made a considerable part of the former dispensation, and by their frequency and sumptuousness they serve to shadow forth the richer blessings of the gospel. Here God himself condescends to be the founder of a feast; and as might be expected, it corresponds with his unbounded munificence, and is every way worthy of himself.

(1) The *place* where the feast is provided is on the summit of a large "mountain," under the canopy of heaven, visible and accessible to all.

(2) The *guests* invited are "all people," the whole world, both Jews and gentiles; not like the sacrificial feasts under the law, which were confined to one nation only. Matt. xxii. 9, 10.

(3) The *feast itself* is composed of the richest dainties, "of fat things full of marrow, and wines on the lees well refined." So rich and so delicious are the provisions of the gospel, that they exceed all comparison, and are such as God only could bestow.

Leaving the imagery of the text, let us proceed to notice the leading sentiment intended to be conveyed by it.

I. That there is a peculiar richness in the truths and blessings of the gospel.

The gospel is called the 'unsearchable riches of Christ,' and its doctrines are 'according to the riches of his grace;' expressions which imply that they are great and glorious, and peculiarly interesting to the heart. By comparing the truths and promises of the gospel with other kinds of truth we shall at once perceive their unspeakable excellence and importance.

1. If we compare all that is known of the works of God *in creation and providence*, with the truths and blessings of the gospel, the difference will be seen to be very great. It is instructive and agreeable to tread the paths of science, to view the wonders of the heavens and the earth, and to penetrate the recesses of nature; all this tends to enlarge our faculties, and to elevate our conceptions of the great Creator and Governor of all things; but when compared with the wonders of the cross, and the unfathomable abysses of divine love opened to us in the

gospel, they appear flat, insipid, and uninteresting; have no tendency to melt, subdue, and fill the mind with penitence and peace. Psal. xix. 1—7.

2. Compare the preacher of *mere morality and virtue*, with one who enters deeply into the spirit of the gospel, and what a difference is perceptible. The one talks of virtue, the other feels it; how cold and meagre is the one, how rich and interesting the other. The difference arises not from diversity of talent, or mental advantage, whether natural or acquired, but from the theme itself. It is that which animates the soul, which gives a divine eloquence, and an unction that is both seen and felt.

3. The peculiar richness of the gospel appears, even in comparison of *other parts of divine revelation*. All divine truth, though of great importance, is not alike interesting. We feel a difference in reading and hearing on different subjects, and even in attending to the same subject, as conducted by different persons. The difference however lies principally in this, that we are most interested where the great truths of the gospel become the theme, and that in proportion as they are exhibited in their own native excellence, unbeclouded with error and darkness. There is such a richness in the blessings of redemption, that when they are set before us in all their fullness, we cannot but feel deeply interested in them; they are like a feast of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.

4. The difference may be perceived in *the writings of different men*, and in the writings of the same men on different subjects. The same genius and talents when employed on other subjects, fail to interest us in the same degree, as when engaged on the subject of redemption. Amongst inspired writers themselves, the same difference is observable; there is no eloquence to be compared with those sublime passages, where Christ and his cross are the theme. They seem raised above themselves, and are altogether transported with the subject. Gal. vi. 14. Ephes. iii. 19. Phil. iii. 8.

II. Observe what there is in the doctrines of the gospel which gives them such a peculiar richness.

1. In the gospel *God has displayed his glory in the most transcendent manner*. His natural perfections are manifest in his works, but it is chiefly in the great system of redemption that his moral perfections are displayed. Here it is where the love, the grace, the compassion of God towards man appears. It is here that he pours forth all his fulness, and unveils the brightness of his throne. Tit. iii. 5—7. 1 John iii. 1.

2. Gospel truths and blessings are those in which *we have the deepest interest*. It is true indeed, they will not appear so to a soul blinded by sin; but to one who sees his lost and ruined state, nothing can be equally important. There is a richness beyond all description in such sentiments as the following: 'Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world. Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. He is able to

save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out. I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.' The value and importance of such declarations cannot be estimated, yet they are what eminently constitute the gospel, and provide a feast of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) If you have tasted of this wine, you will not straightway desire any other, for this alone it is that maketh glad the heart of man.

(2) The feast of God's providing is open for all to partake of it. It is "made unto all people," and the invitation is sent into all directions, that the table may be furnished with guests. Matt. xxii. 9. Rev. xxii. 17.

(3) The refusal of so much mercy will not only leave the unbeliever without excuse, but awfully heighten his condemnation. Prov. i. 24—28.

HUMAN WEAKNESS SUBSERVIENT TO THE POWER OF CHRIST.

Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.—2 Corinthians xii. 9.

The false teachers, who had perverted the minds of the Corinthians, did all in their power to traduce the character and talents of the apostle Paul, alleging that his bodily presence was weak, and his speech contemptible. The apostle modestly admits, that he did not use 'enticing words of man's wisdom,' nor 'come to them with excellency of speech;' and as to his talents and general appearance, he would say nothing. But if he must imitate their boasting, he would glory in the very things for which he was despised.

(1) Then observe *the object* of his glorying, even "his infirmities." By these he does not mean his moral weaknesses, or sinful infirmities, but those natural defects and outward disadvantages which attended him; his affliction, reproaches, and persecutions, as it is explained in ver. 10.

(2) *The reason* why he would glory in his infirmities, "that the power of Christ might rest upon him." Not that they were in themselves desirable, but they furnished an occasion for God to impart his grace, and Christ his power. Hence the apostle could say, when I am weak then am I strong; even as the consolations of the gospel are more powerfully felt in a season of adversity. When in necessities, Christ makes it up with his presence, and causes every thing to turn to our spiritual advantage.

I. Notice a few instances in which our being humbled, and made to feel our own weakness, prepares us to receive in a larger degree, the power and the grace of Christ.

It is God's usual way to empty us of ourselves, before he fills us with his own fulness; to render us weak, before we are made strong; to kill, before he makes alive.

1. A sense of our own weakness and insufficiency presedes *our first participation of divine strength and consolation.* While Paul was alive without the law he felt no need of Christ, but when he died to his former hopes he began to live. The reason why many find no rest to their souls is, they are not weaned from self-righteousness, and have not been emptied from vessel to vessel. They are not helpless in themselves, and God till then withholds his help. Till then there is no coming to Christ, for those only come who are ready to perish.

2. A sense of our own weakness and insufficiency, during our progress in the divine life, *constantly presedes the communication of grace and strength.* If in seeking heavenly wisdom we are wise in our own eyes, we shall not find it. If in times of temptation we are self-confident, we shall be left to fall as Peter did: but if with Jehoshaphat we feel that we have no might against this great host, and our eyes are upon the Lord, we shall be strengthened from above. If in serving our generation by the will of God we are self-sufficient, and depend upon our own zealous exertions, we shall soon be exhausted: but if we have no might of our own, we shall wait upon the Lord, and renew our strength. Isai. xl. 29—31. 2 Chron. xx. 12.

3. When ministers are most deeply sensible of their own insufficiency, *that is the most likely time for God to bless their labours.* If they imagine themselves well prepared for their engagements, it is most probable they will fail in their attempts; and when they have the greatest expectation of doing good by their exertions, that is seldom the time for God to work. If ever they are strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, it is when self is utterly renounced and annihilated; and hence the Lord often blesses his servants when their hands are weak, and their hearts are faint.

4. When the servants of God collectively are reduced to a small number, and their strength seems to be dried up, *then it is often God's time to work.* When Gideon's army was strong, that was not the time to defeat the Midianites; but when reduced to three hundred, the Lord gave them the victory. When great expectations have been raised from the number and strength of those engaged in any religious undertaking, it has often been the same; to show that it is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Zech. iv. 6. When God would raise up the Jewish nation, he did not call a number of them at once; but he called Abraham alone, and blessed him. Isai. li. 2. When he would set up Christ's kingdom, he did not convert a great multitude, and send them forth to preach; he called twelve poor fishermen, and endowed them with power from on high. 2 Cor. iv. 7.

II. Observe how the infirmities and ills of life are hereby converted into good to us, and become an object of glorying.

Infirmities, reproaches, and distresses, if they do but humble us and wean us from the world, will turn to our advantage.

1. In this view primitive christians had much reason to glory in *the sufferings* they endured for Christ's sake, for at no period was there such a display of the power and grace of Christ, or so rich an enjoyment of the divine presence and blessing.

2. In this view we also may glory in some of our *heaviest afflictions*, as they have been the means of laying us low, and bringing us near to God. Many have been purified in that furnace, and can look back to it as the best season in their whole lives.

3. We may also for the same reason rejoice in some of our most painful *losses and disappointments*. It was never better with the Jewish church, as to spiritual prosperity, than when in captivity in Babylon. In the loss of all created good, she could rejoice in the Lord as her portion, and quietly wait for his salvation.

4. In this view we may have to glory *in the prospect of death itself*. Here every human hope vanishes, and flesh and heart must fail. Man then appears in the lowest state of humiliation and nothingness, possessing no hope but in the Lord; and that is often the time when the power and grace of Christ rest most eminently upon his people. That is a time when many a weak and drooping christian has been made to triumph, and the feeblest of all have taken the prey. The last and most formidable enemy is made the messenger of greater good than all that have gone before. Most gladly therefore may we glory in our infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon us.

CLEANSING OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.—Matthew iii. 12.

The work of John the Baptist was to prepare the way of the Lord; this he did by calling sinners to repentance, by baptizing them, and making known the character and work of the Messiah. He is here compared to an eastern husbandman, who in the time of harvest threshes out the corn in the field, and winnows it; and having brought home the precious grain, burns up the stubble and the chaff.

I. The state of the visible church is compared to a quantity of wheat mixed with chaff upon the floor.

1. The truly godly are fitly *compared to wheat*, that requires and

will bear the winnowing. This is evident in the case of Job, Asaph, Peter, and many others, who were tried and purified by various afflictions. They are not blown away with every wind of doctrine, nor driven away by the blasts of temptation. They are God's treasure and portion in this world, his threshing, and the corn of his floor. Isai. xxi. 10.

2. Light and empty professors are fitly *compared to chaff*, which grows up near the corn, and is closely connected with it, but distinguished from it and rejected. So Ahithophel was closely connected with David, and Judas with the eleven disciples; but like chaff among the wheat, they were soon blown away. All that such men do in religion is nothing worth, there is no heart in it, it is all outside work like that of the Pharisee.

3. The state of the church in all ages, especially in our Lord's time, consisted of *a mixture of the chaff and the wheat.* The visible church is composed of all that profess or appear to be christians, but the true church consists of such only as are so in reality and in truth. In our Lord's time there was but little grain, and a great deal of chaff, the majority of the Jews continuing in a state of unbelief, with all their pretensions of being the people of God. Even the twelve apostles had a devil among them, and in every age there are false teachers and false professors that mingle with the true.

II. The work of Christ is to separate the precious from the vile, and thoroughly to purge his floor.

This however is not all done at once, but successively, and by various means, till the chaff shall all be carried away at last.

1. The humbling and *searching nature of Christ's doctrine*, is one means of effecting this separation. The gospel teaches, as first principles, the necessity of repentance, of faith in Christ, and of being born again, in order to salvation; and where these are truly and faithfully stated, there are many who will turn away, because they cannot endure what is so mortifying to the pride of human nature. Yet there are some who can bear all this, without being offended, while they are nothing but chaff among the wheat; another winnowing therefore must be prepared for them.

2. The strictness and *purity of Christ's precepts* is a means of cleansing the floor. One of the first of these is self-denial, and bearing the cross; and this is sufficient to send away a sensualist, whose whole concern it is to live after the flesh. Another of his precepts is, to love our neighbour as ourselves, to feed the hungry, and clothe the naked; and this is what the covetous and the selfish are not able to endure. Yet there are some who can bear all this, and much more; and to whom it is a gratification, rather than otherwise, to perform acts of charity and benevolence, who nevertheless are strangers to the love of God, and remain as chaff upon the floor.

3. The *discipline of the church* is another means of effecting the separation, and many an unworthy member is cast out. The mere professor may continue long with real christians undiscovered, but when

reproved for some fault he is offended, and walks no more with them. The admonitions of the church have blown multitudes away, like chaff before the wind; yet fidelity to Christ requires that in this case there should be no respect of persons. This is the fan in Christ's hand, but if we take it into our own hand, we shall be in danger of blowing away the wheat with the chaff.

4. *Persecution and reproach* on account of the gospel, have often been the means of cleansing the church. Many that have heard the word with joy, and promised fair for the kingdom of heaven, have not been able to endure reproach; and when a storm of persecution arises, they are driven like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor, and their blossom has gone up like dust.

5. The *temptations of the world* are also like a fan in Christ's hand, with which he cleanses his floor. Many that have endured other previous trials, have gone before this. Judas could bear persecution and reproach, but could not resist the temptation of enriching himself when the opportunity offered, though at the expense of innocent blood. Demas went through many troubles with Paul, but the love of the world carried him away at last.

6. Divisions and *contentions in the church*, are sometimes the occasion of cleansing the floor. While things go on smooth and easy, the mere formalist feels himself at rest; but when divisions and offences arise among brethren, they take the opportunity of turning their backs upon the gospel, and are seen no more.

7. *False doctrines*, by the overruling hand of God has been subservient to the same purpose. Attracted by the novelty of the system, or its pretensions to rationality or orthodoxy, many a vain professor, puffed up by his fleshly mind, has gone off from the truth, and been driven into the whirlpool of error. They stood many former trials, endured persecution, and did something in a way of self-denial and zeal for God; but by and bye they are bewitched by some seducing doctrine, and no longer obey the truth. Gal. iii. 1. 1 John ii. 19.

8. The final means of separation is *death*, when Christ will thoroughly purge his floor. Nothing that is holy can enter into heaven, the precious and the vile will no longer be mixed, but separated, to meet no more. Mal. iii. 18.

III. The final state of each.

"He will gather his wheat into the garner." It is sown in different fields, in successive ages of the world; but when the reapers are sent forth to gather in the harvest, all the saints shall be collected together, and lodged in the storehouse of heaven, as the reward of the great Husbandman, and the fruit of all his toil.

"But he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Such will be the doom of hypocrites and self-deceivers, and of all the finally impenitent.

This subject should lead to self-examination, that we may be approved of God, and found of him in peace.

Let us also observe the effect of all our difficulties and trials, whether they tend to purify and meeten us for the kingdom of God. They are as the fan in Christ's hand, to take away the chaff and the dross, not only from the church, but from the hearts of individual believers.

SATAN DESTROYED BY THE WOMAN'S SEED.

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.—Genesis iii. 16.

This chapter briefly relates some of the most important events that occurred soon after the creation, such as the fall of man, its immediate consequences, and the opening of a door of hope to a ruined world.

By "the head" of the serpent is not meant the person of the grand adversary, but his cause or kingdom; for what relates to his person is reserved to the judgment of the great day. The head is the seat of wisdom, policy, and subtlety; and the "bruising" of it signifies the defeat and overthrow of all his plans. The head being also in great measure the seat of life, as well as of wisdom, it denotes the crushing and totally destroying his empire in the world.

By "the seed of the woman" is principally intended the person of Christ, born of a virgin, and therefore pre-eminently the woman's seed. His followers may also be comprehended under the same term, as they also are in an inferior sense the seed of the woman.

The general import of the passage is, That as Satan had attempted to ruin man, so by man should his ruin come; and that as he had made use of the woman in particular to seduce her husband, so from this source should proceed his final overthrow.

I. Let us see this truth exemplified in the person of Christ.

It was the glory of God and the confusion of Satan, that as by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead, and eternal redemption. God would not undertake to bring destruction upon Satan by his own immediate agency, for that would have been beneath his dignity; but he would make use of an inferior nature to accomplish it. The Son of God must be made of a woman, and take on him the likeness of sinful flesh, that Satan may be overcome by that very nature he had despised, and sought to ruin.

In order to see how Satan's kingdom has been broken and ruined, we must consider that his design was to bring dishonour upon God, and ruin upon man. Hence Christ is said to have destroyed the works of the devil, and to have spoiled principalities and powers.

1. He hoped to be revenged on his Creator for his previous ejectment,

by marring the new-made world, turning it all into confusion, and bringing its inhabitants to destruction and ruin. But the Seed of the woman has confounded this scheme; the earth shall once more become a paradise, and the will of God be done on earth as it is in heaven. Matt. vi. 10. 2 Pet. iii. 13.

2. By drawing man into sin, he hoped to reduce the blessed God to the necessity of *destroying the human race*, or of annulling his threatening against sin; either of which would have gratified his malignity. But the Seed of the woman has entirely frustrated this scheme also; and God would neither give up the world to destruction, nor break his word in saving mankind from it.

3. He hoped to render *the divine threatnings subservient to his purposes*, particularly the threatening of death as the wages of sin; so that every time it was put into execution, it would increase the number of the lost, and multiply the inhabitants of hell. But Christ destroyed this design also, and death is now become subservient to him and to his followers, and shall eventually be swallowed up in victory. Hosea xiii. 14.

4. He hoped to ruin the whole race of man, *by setting them against God and one another*, by a perpetual variance. He had begun a warfare which he expected would end in man's destruction. But Christ has disappointed him, and none now are ruined and lost but those who adhere to the serpent's cause; and even their ruin adds to his misery and disgrace.

The serpent and his seed were not only employed at first in drawing man into sin, but to the present time the same plan is pursued; especially with a view to frustrate all God's purposes of redemption. No sooner was the Saviour born than Satan sought his life, and stirred up Herod to destroy him. When come to years he hoped to seduce him by temptation, and to overcome him in the wilderness. When this failed he entered into Judas, and put it into his heart to betray him, hoping to ruin all by getting him put to death. But Christ spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them even in his cross, where Satan had hoped for complete and ultimate success. Col. ii. 15. When he ascended into heaven, his enemies are represented as completely routed and overcome, and even dragged at his chariot wheels. Psal. lxviii. 17, 18.

II. Let us see the same truth exemplified in the followers of Christ.

Though Christ is chiefly intended by the Seed of the woman, it is evident that his people are included; they must also be engaged in this warfare, and shall finally overcome; and it is to the glory of God that he will cause even them to set their feet upon the neck of this enemy. Rom. xvi. 20.

As the serpent is still "bruising the heel" of the woman's seed, by persecution and temptation; so God is still causing the woman's seed to "bruise his head," and will finally exterminate him and his cause from the earth.

1. This end is accomplished by *the preaching of the gospel*. This is the great means which God employs for the destruction of Satan's

cause: every degree of success in counteracting the tendency of error and sin, every soul that is converted to God, is a fulfilment of the promise in the text. The serpent's cause prevailed throughout the heathen world in all ages; but he fell as lightning from heaven, by the first preaching of the gospel; and his kingdom is still falling by the same means. Luke x. 18. It is greatly also to the glory of God, to employ a company of poor feeble men, who had themselves been his slaves and subjects, to bruise the head of this adversary. And when he had gained the greater part of the world on his side, and was sorely bruising the heel of the woman's seed, God caused them to bruise his head, and to overturn his empire in the Roman world.

2. This end is accomplished by *the conflict of individual believers.* They also shall overcome, and do overcome, by the blood of the Lamb. Rev. xii. 11. All their sucessful efforts to mortify sin, to overcome the world, to endure persecution and reproach, go to the same result. This also is greatly to the glory of God, not only to strengthen his Son to tread upon the lion and the adder, but all his people; causing even a worm to thresh the mountain. Isai. xli. 13—15. Joshua x. 24.

If we anticipate success in this warfare, we must be united to Christ by faith, must enter heartily into his cause, and derive all our strength from him, or Satan will not regard our opposition. His language will be, Jesus I know, and Paul I know: but who are ye? We can only overcome by the blood of the Lamb; and if we are truly on the Lord's side, the prospect of final victory will give us abundant joy.

THE HOPE OF THE DESTITUTE.

He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.—Psalm cii. 17.

Like many other of the psalms, this was written in the time of the captivity. In the beginning of it, the writer personates the church, and enters much into her feelings. The text, and the following part of the psalm, is the language of hope and joy. The immutability of God, his promises of mercy towards Zion, and the re-appearance of his glory among them, were a source of comfort to the pious captives, ver. 13—16. The revival of the church would be like a coronation, when there should be a goal delivery, and the most destitute should be comforted.

I. Attend to the case of the destitute, and their encouragement to call upon the name of the Lord.

1. This character would apply to *Israel as a nation.* At that time they were utterly destitute of help and strength, having no armies of their own, or means of self-defence; and if they implored the mercy of their conquerors, their prayer would be despised. Psal. xliv. 9—14.

The complaints of the weak and the oppressed are seldom regarded by the great and powerful, and even nations are seldom known to respect any people but those whom they fear. Israel in Egypt cried in vain to their oppressors, in Babylon also, and the poor enslaved Africans to this day do the same: but "God will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer."

2. As *the church and people of God*, they were also in a destitute condition. While in Babylon they were deprived of public ordinances, and the ways of Zion mourned; no Sabbaths were enjoyed, and none came to their solemn feasts. Lam. ii. 6, 7. David fainted and was discouraged, when banished from the house of the Lord only for a little time: what then must have been the sufferings of the church for seventy years, without any of the ordinary means of grace. They could do little less than fast and weep, during the whole of the captivity. Zech. vii. 5. In this view they were also an object of derision among their enemies; but God would hear their prayer even then.

3. *As individuals* they were also destitute, and poor and needy. By the captivity they had lost their worldly all, and were reduced to great distress. Lam. iv. 4, 5. They had fared delicately, and now they wanted bread; and being poor, they were also despised. Amidst all their temporal afflictions, God also withheld the light of his countenance, and answered not their prayer. Lam. iii. 8. The Lord therefore seemed to despise the prayer of the destitute, and this would be the greatest of all calamities.

There are also several other cases of destitution, to which the text may be applied—

(1) To those who are destitute of *earthly comforts.* The Lord tries many of his people in this way, especially at certain times and seasons. It has been the lot of some of the best of men to be thus exercised, and to be poor and friendless. Lazarus was one of these, and even the Son of man had not where to lay his head.

(2) *The mind* is sometimes *low and desolate*, and much inward disquietude prevails. When the hand of God is gone out against us, we go mourning all the day, saying with David, How long shall I take counsel in my soul? There are times also in which we can derive no comfort from friends, but want to retire alone to weep, and pour out our souls before the Lord.

(3) The soul is often destitute from *spiritual troubles.* A sense of guilt will cause dejection, and then those things which used to afford comfort are nothing to us. The awakened sinner, oppressed with a load of guilt, is full of darkness, and can find no comfort, no plea but that of the publican. Or if the blessing be withheld from the means of grace, or there be no freedom in prayer, and no communion with God, the soul is desolate and sad, and every duty seems to be unprofitable and vain.

II. Consider the mercy provided for such. "The Lord will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer."

1. If any are destitute of *earthly comforts*, let them look to him, and it shall not be in vain. If poverty and affliction lead to prayer, that

prayer shall not be despised. God will provide means of relief, as he did for Israel in Egypt. Psal. cvii. 6, 13.

2. Those who are destitute under *spiritual troubles* shall also find relief. To be poor in spirit is a state of mind that God regards, he dwells with such to revive and comfort them. Isai. lvii. 15. He is a helper of the helpless; and to those who have no might, no righteousness of their own, no confidence in themselves, he increaseth strength. Isai. xl. 29. 2 Cor. vii. 6.

3. This kind of mercy is more especially conferred in seasons of *the church's prosperity.* Times of public revival are accompanied with mercy to individuals. Hos. xiv. 7. It was thus when the Lord revived his church in the apostles' time; the outcasts were gathered in, and the most abject were relieved and comforted. Where revivals have only been partial, similar effects have followed, and will be still more abundant in the latter day. Let us therefore pray for Zion's prosperity, for in her welfare we shall find our own. Psal. lxxxv. 6.

TRUE RELIGION ESSENTIAL TO TRUE WISDOM.

Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.—Job xxviii. 28.

Job's friends pretended to be wise, and they could interpret the ways of providence, and thereby determine the character of men. The design of this chapter therefore is to reprove their folly. Job insists that there is a depth in wisdom, and in the ways of providence, beyond the reach of our faculties. He allows that men had made great researches, but had not gone far enough for this, ver. 1—12. God only is possessed of this wisdom, so as fully to comprehend his own plan, ver. 23. He concludes that man's wisdom is not to pry into the mysteries of providence, but to obey the will of God.

I. Observe wherein true wisdom is said to consist: in "the fear of the Lord."

This term is expressive of true religion, though more especially applicable to the former dispensation. Had it been described in gospel language, it would have been said to consist in repentance, believing in Christ, in loving and serving him. It is the same however in substance, for the fear of the Lord will lead to all this, and is essential to it.

The fear of the Lord does not mean that we should be afraid of him, or dread to think about God; for this is the feeling of the slothful servant, which deters from action. It is a filial fear, dreading his displeasure, and doing what he requires of us, from reverence and love.

1. The fear of the Lord may stand opposed to *atheism.* The wicked have said in their hearts, No God. Some maintain that there is

none, and others act as if there were none. 'They have no fear of God before their eyes: God is not in all their thoughts.' They do nothing in obedience to his will, nor abstain from any evil lest it should offend him. Such was the state of the ancient heathens, and hence Abraham was afraid to dwell in Gerar. Gen. xx. 11. Such also is the state of all modern heathen nations, and of all unbelievers. In opposition to all this, the servants of God must walk as in his sight. The fear of the Lord is the source of all true devotion towards him, and of all moral principle, justice, and mercy amongst men. Gen. xlii. 18.

2. The fear of the Lord is opposed to *the pride of science.* Vain man would be wise, though ignorant of his own nothingness. Philosophy falsely so called, induces men to dive into subjects too deep for the human mind to fathom; they then arraign the divine wisdom, and assert that this and the other cannot be true, because they cannot comprehend how it is so. In this way, men who are vain of their learning, pronounce upon religion, and try it by their own feeble understanding. Opposed to this is true wisdom, or the fear of the Lord, which renders us humble and teachable, and makes us of quick understanding in the great things of God. 1 John ii. 20.

3. It is opposed to *mere carnal policy*, as a rule of life. Every man walks by some rule, or principle of action. Carnal men are not governed by what is right, but what will be most to their advantage: public bodies of men, and individuals, would all walk by this rule, if God were to leave them to their own hearts. In this way we should ever be deceived, or walk in great uncertainty, for we know not how things may issue. But God knows all things from the beginning; it becomes us therefore to follow his counsel, to walk in his light, and leave the consequences. This only is true wisdom.

4. The fear of the Lord is opposed to *libertinism*, or living after the flesh. It is to make it our constant care to "depart from evil, which is understanding." If we were innocent, the fear of the Lord would keep us out of evil: but we are not, and therefore it warns us to depart from it, and not to come in contact with what will be sure to effect our ruin and disgrace. It also supposes that at present there is a way of escape, and that is a great mercy. There might have been none, and there will be none in another world. How then are we to depart from evil? Only by repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. All other ways are vain, and will only lead from one evil to another. This will be giving up all false schemes and ways of salvation; and by cleaving to the Lord, and following after him, we shall be kept out of the way of temptation and of danger.

II. Notice the wisdom there is in the fear of the Lord, and in departing from evil.

Wisdom is not so much of a speculative as of a practical nature, leading to the pursuit of the greatest good.

1. The fear of the Lord will cause us to *dread his displeasure*, and to flee from the wrath to come, by making Christ our refuge. Now this is true wisdom, for a great day is coming for which all other days

were made. Noah being moved with fear, prepared an ark, when the flood was coming upon the earth. For us the ark is already prepared, and he is truly wise that enters in.

2. The fear of the Lord will lead us to *worship him*, through the Mediator; and there can be no reverence of God without it. This also is true wisdom; and it is wise in kings to submit, and pay their homage at his feet. Psal. ii. 10—12.

3. The forming of *connections*, and choosing our *situations* in life, is a matter of great importance; and if we do it in the fear of the Lord, we shall find it to be our truest wisdom. Men of mere wordly prudence, mind only what relates to temporal good; but let us learn to fear God, and to acknowledge him in all our ways; we shall then become the companions of them that fear him, and keep his precepts. Lot chose for his situation the well-watered plains of Sodom: but what did he get by it? Happiness in this world does not so much consist in abundance, as in the blessing of God on what we possess.

4. In passing through life we are exposed to *numerous temptations*, and the fear of the Lord only can preserve us. This also is our wisdom, for it will teach us in the hour of danger to say with Joseph, How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God. We are also subject to injuries from men, and afflictions from the hand of God; but if his fear be in our hearts, it will arm us against them all. In the time of trouble he shall hide us in his pavilion, and set our feet upon a rock. Psal. xxvii. 1. Isai. viii. 12—14.

5. In passing through life we must have intercourse and *dealings with men*, and the fear of the Lord will teach us that nothing but integrity and uprightness can preserve us. There is no policy, no wisdom, like that of inflexible fidelity and truth; and if all men were influenced by such principles, the world would be full of justice, happiness, and peace.

In short, that is true wisdom which takes into consideration the whole of duration; but this is what true religion, or the fear of the Lord, only can teach. There is therefore no real wisdom or understanding, apart from this. Jer. ix. 23, 24. Prov. iv. 5—8.

SINNERS INVITED TO RETURN TO GOD.

Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.—Isaiah lv. 6. 7.

This part of the prophecy refers to gospel times, and is full of encouragement to sinners, both Jews and gentiles, to return to God and be saved. They are first invited in figurative language, ver. 1, 2; after-

wards in terms more literal and direct, ver. 3—7. Thus it is that infinite mercy condescends, by various means, to allure and bring us to the Saviour.

I. Explain the different parts of the invitation.

In general we are required to relinquish whatever would hinder our seeking the Lord and returning to him; and the purport of the exhortation is equivalent to what in new-testament language is called, repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. "Seek ye the Lord." This implies that there is a moral distance between God and us, though he be not far from every one of us, as to his real presence. His power upholds, his goodness provides for us, and his eye is continually over us. But his favour is forfeited by sin, and he has in anger departed from us. In what way therefore is he to be sought, or his favour to be enjoyed? Formerly he was sought in the way of sacrifices, and thus it was that David and others found him. But all this was typical of that new and living way, by which we draw near to God. Christ is the way, the only way: nor is there any other name given under heaven, or amongst men, whereby we must be saved. In all our seeking unto God therefore, we must come by faith in the Mediator. John xiv. 6. Heb. vii. 25.

2. "Call ye upon him." This expression explains the former; we are to seek the Lord by calling upon his name. All true religion begins with prayer, not in repeating a form of words which we have learned by heart, but in pouring forth our souls before him, and this in the name of Jesus. Hence when Saul of Tarsus was converted, the first intimation of it was thus given: Behold, he prayeth. The cry for mercy will be heard, as soon as there is a sense of guilt and danger.

3. We are to seek the Lord and call upon him without delay, "while he may be found, and while he is near." We are prone to procrastinate, to put off repentance and prayer, and to flatter ourselves that it is not immediately necessary. Some are persuaded that they are too young to begin in earnest to seek the Lord, and others are so occupied that they cannot find time, or they think they would do it. Thus life is spent in fruitless resolutions, like the man in the parable, who said 'I go, sir,' but went not. Behold now is the accepted time: walk in the light while ye have the light: and agree with thine adversary quickly. Matt. v. 25. John vii. 34. viii. 21.

4. We are to relinquish every thing that stands in the way of seeking God, and calling upon him. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." Not merely desist in some instances, and for a time, but let him utterly "forsake his way." Some continue intemperate, covetous, profane, full of revenge; yet they come to hear the word, and hope to be saved at last. This however is impossible: every evil way must be given up, before we can seek the Lord aright, or call upon his name. Our "thoughts" too must be changed, as well as our way. All self-justifying and self-righteous thoughts must be given up; and all hard thoughts of God, all low thoughts of Christ must be forsaken. There must be an entire change of heart, as well as of the outward conduct. 2 Cor. v. 17.

5. Nor is this all: we must "return unto the Lord." There must not only be a change or turn of some sort, but a turning "to the Lord." There may be a turning from some of our evil ways, and our thoughts upon many subjects may undergo a change, where there is no real turning of the heart to God. Jer. iv. 1. But if we wish to see true conversion exemplified, we may behold it in the case of Ephraim, and of the prodigal son. Jer. xxxi. 18, 19. Luke xv. 18.

II. The motives by which the exhortation is enforced.

These are of two kinds; one addressed to our fears, and the other to our hopes.

1. Here are motives addressed to our *fears*, and these are contained in the invitation itself. In particular it is intimated, that there is a time coming when God cannot be found, and when those who have not sought him here shall be removed to an eternal distance from him. At present the word is nigh thee, and the way is plain; the Spirit and the bride say come. At present ministers, having the word of reconciliation committed to them, are pleading and beseeching sinners to be reconciled to God: but it will not always be thus. When once the master of the house is risen up he will shut to the door, and no more cries for mercy will be heard. Luke xiii. 24, 25. Then it will afford bitter reflection that the kingdom of God once came nigh, but ye refused to enter in. Luke x. 11, 12. Seeking and calling will then be all in vain. Prov. i. 24—30.

2. Here are motives also addressed to our *hopes*, and such as are highly encouraging. The characters invited are amongst the vilest of the vile, "the wicked and the unrighteous." We must come to God therefore just as we are, without merit or meetness of any kind, as sinners ready to perish; the promise being, that whosoever cometh he will in no wise cast out. John vi. 37. To this is added the solemn assurance of mercy, and of plenteous redemption. Let but the sinner return to God, and "he will have mercy upon him," yea he will "abundantly pardon." You may think your sins too many, too great to be forgiven; but God's thoughts are here contrasted with our thoughts, and his ways of showing mercy with our ways, ver. 8. We are apt to imagine that God is as unwilling to forgive as we are, or that if our sins had been less aggravated there might have been some hope: but the text is an answer to all these objections.

If you plead as an excuse, that you cannot come to God, recollect that nothing but hardness of heart and the love of sin prevents; and this, instead of being an excuse, will only increase your condemnation. John v. 40.

But if this inability be lamented and bewailed, cry as Ephraim did, 'Turn thou me, and I shall be turned.' Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.

CHRISTIAN EQUALITY.

But God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked; that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care, one for another.—1 Corinthians xii. 24, 25.

Amongst other evils which prevailed in the church at Corinth, the pride of gifts and talents was one; the apostle therefore devotes a whole chapter to the subject, and explains the nature of spiritual gifts. The imagery employed for this purpose is taken from the various members of the human body, where a schism would be very unnatural, and it was equally unwise in the Corinthians to have contentions and divisions among themselves on account of their diversified gifts.

(1) The writer addresses himself to the *inferior* members of the church, who were in danger of being discouraged, and of concluding that they were not of the body, ver. 15, 20.

(2) He addresses himself to the *superior* members, who overvalued themselves on account of their gifts, and neglected or despised their weaker brethren, ver. 21.

(3) The apostle notices the *peculiar honour* usually bestowed on the less comely parts of the human body, intimating that God does the same by his church; that therefore we should follow his example, being kind and tender to the poor and weak of the flock, ver. 23.

I. Briefly notice the sin and folly of the gifted members of Christ's body exalting themselves in a way of invidious distinction above others.

"Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth," gives strength and firmness to the building. There is no solid religion without this; and had the Corinthians possessed more of it, they would not have despised their weaker brethren. They might boast indeed of their intelligence; but what would "the eye" do, if plucked from the body; and what would it be without the other members. Private christians of a lowly and humble form are of great importance in the church, and even to a minister. Their early presence in the sanctuary, their prayers, their earnest attention to the word, give life to the soul of the preacher; and in them it is he usually sees the good effect of his labours, rather than in those of a superior class. Matt. xi. 5, 25. 1 Cor. i. 26—29.

II. The danger of the weak and feeble members of Christ's body being discouraged on account of their insignificance, and the treatment they meet with from others, as if they were not of the body.

A poor christian may think, if he had wealth he might do something for the cause; but now he is overlooked and useless. A timid believer may think, if he could speak and defend the truth, he might be of some use in the body; but now he is nothing, and can do nothing.

Thus it was of old in the Jewish church: eunuchs and strangers, were not allowed to enter the house of the Lord, but God owned them, and would give them a name and a place better than that of sons and of daughters. Isai. lvi. 3—5. So if our hearts be right with him, he will regard us as members of the mystical body, whatever be the conduct of others towards us. Isai. lxiii. 16. To remove objections of this kind the apostle asks, Are they not of the body? Yes, and necessary to it, ver. 22. If they were removed, the rest would feel the need of them, even of the least among them.

There is a great force in this question, 'Are they not of the body?' It implies—(1) That they are *united to Christ*, and partake of his fulness, even of all that is common to the body. They are equally interested in the love of Christ, and his salvation, for he is the Saviour of the whole body. Ephes. v. 23, 30. They have a part in all his gracious communications, and are essential to the constitution of his relative fulness. Ephes. iv. 16. i. 23.—(2) If they are united to Christ, surely they are a part of his mystical body, and are *united to his people.* They are therefore entitled to all the privileges and honours which they enjoy, have an equal share in all their labours and exertions, and the body cannot do without them.

III. Observe the peculiar honour which God confers on the weaker members of his church.

In order to reprove and prevent any unlovely carriage towards the poorer members, God hath put "more abundant honour upon them, that there should be no schism in the body."

1. That which *distinguishes* the stronger and more gifted members of Christ, is of far less importance than that which they possess in *common* with the rest. The one possess gifts, but the other grace; and the latter is far more excellent, ver. 31. All the desire of David was for a blessing common to all the saints. Psal. xxvii. 4. Paul's glorying in the cross, Gal. vi. 14, is the glory of all. He placed himself among the chief of sinners, and the least of all saints; and thus stood upon a level with the very lowest.

2. The greater is made *subordinate to the less*, and not the less to the greater. Those who are the greatest of all, are also the servants of all, like the eye and the hand to the body: they exist not for themselves but for it. Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos? All are yours, and ye are Christ's. 1 Cor. iii. 21. Ephes iv. 11—13.

3. God has conferred peculiar honour upon *the weak and despised*, in the dispensations of his grace, having generally selected them for his *peculiar people.* 1 Cor. i. 27. James ii. 5. This truth has been exemplified in all ages. Zeph. iii. 12.

4. The *promises and consolations* of the gospel are addressed to us, not as gifted, but as gracious, as poor and weak and helpless.
God speaks encouragement to both rich and poor, but in a different manner. Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted, but the rich in that he is made low. Jam. i. 9, 10. Nor shall the services of the poor be forgotten, even a cup of cold water shall not lose its reward. Matt. x. 42.

5. That which is peculiar to the gifted and the honourable, is *only for a time;* but that which is common to all christians, is as a well of water springing up to everlasting life. Gifts of every kind shall soon cease, but love never faileth; and he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. 1 Cor. xiii. 8. 1 John ii. 17.

If we are members of Christ, let us prize our privileges, and be careful to cultivate brotherly love.

If not united to Christ and his people, we are poor and miserable, whatever be our outward circumstances.

PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.—Mark iv. 26—28.

Many of our Lord's parables were intended to fit and prepare his disciples for their work, this in particular is designed to encourage them in the ministry of the word. They would sow the seed of the kingdom, and sometimes perceive but little fruit from it. Yet they must go on like the husbandman, hoping to see a harvest at last; and in due time they shall reap, if they faint not.

The parable in the text shows us the commencement and the progress of true religion, together with the imperceptible means by which it attains maturity.

I. We have a parabolical representation of the commencement of true religion. It is the gospel received into the heart, like "the seed cast into the ground," ver. 26.

The word of God may be heard, and rejected, or the seed may fall in stony places. In other instances it produces a transient effect upon the passions, and yet the truth may have no place in us. Conscience may be brought over, where the heart is not gained. Strong fears may be excited, and a heavy burden felt, and yet that burden not be carried to Christ. We may break off many sins, and conform to various duties, and all to little purpose; but if the gospel be cordially received, it will become a living principle within us, and all false schemes will be given up. Never were men more averse than Peter's hearers, yet they were pricked to the heart, and gladly embraced the Saviour.

More particularly—

1. The gospel supposes the *guilty and perishing* condition of sinners. This affecting truth was once disbelieved and disregarded:

now it is deeply felt, and rooted in the heart. It governs all the prayers of the penitent, and he comes to God like the publican, seeking for mercy as one of the chief of sinners.

2. The gospel teaches us that if ever we be saved it must be *by grace alone.* You may have admitted this in theory, or you may not: but if the seed of the kingdom be sown in the heart, you now believe and know it to be true, and pray to be saved in no other way.

3. That if God be merciful to us, it must be purely *for the sake of his Son*, in whom he is well pleased. Heretofore you felt no such need of him, but thought God might forgive you on your repentance and reformation. But now that the gospel is cordially embraced, Christ is your only hope, and your only refuge; all you ask is in his name, and for his sake.

4. That if ever we be saved, it must be *from our sins*, as well as from the wrath to come. When the seed of the kingdom is sown in the heart, and takes root there, this truth becomes most acceptable; and to be saved from all iniquity, is now the object of supreme desire.

II. Observe the progress of true religion in the heart. "The seed springeth and groweth up, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear," ver. 27, 28.

The first of these describes true religion in its early stages, the next in its middle state, and the last in a state of maturity.

1. Observe its *early stages*, at first conversion, and in the day of our espousals. The distinguishing effects of the grace of God at this period are, grateful returns for pardoning mercy, and a prompt and diligent attention to Christ's commands. Acts ix. 6. Psal. cxix. 60. There is then a going and weeping, and seeking the Lord, like the children of Israel and of Judah. Jer. l. 4, 5. The corn in the "blade" is beautiful and cheering to the husbandman, but it is often followed with blighting winds and frosts, and doubtful appearances; but if it stands these blasts it strikes a deeper root, and improves in strength and verdure. Such also, in its earlier stages, is the nature of the kingdom of God.

2. Observe its *middle state*, or "the corn in the ear." The effects of true religion at this period are somewhat different from the former. In the family of God there are babes, young men, and fathers. Those of the second class are represented as sustaining many conflicts, both with the world and the wicked one, but they finally overcome. 1 John ii. 12—14. This is a period of the religious life in which many are overcome with the cares of the world, and the love of riches: but the true believer will stand and bring forth fruit, like the corn in the ear. It is also a good sign when the flower of life is devoted to the Lord.

3. The *state of maturity*, or "the full corn in the ear." The fruits of this period are a more enlarged knowledge of Christ and his gospel, or as John describes it, 'knowing him that was from the beginning.' David refers to this part of the religious life, in Psal. xcii. 13—15. Paul also describes it in Rom. v. 3, as producing patience expe-

rience, and hope. In short true religion in the first stage consists much of the affectionate, in the second much of the active, and in the last much of the experienced, and of the exercise of hope. 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

III. The imperceptibleness of this process. "While the sower sleepeth, and riseth night and day, the seed springeth and groweth up, he knoweth not how," ver. 27.

Something like this may be predicated of those who are the subjects of true religion. We know not how, or by what mysterious process our hearts are renewed by the grace of God, nor how we make progress in the divine life: we only know that so it is, and the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause. But the style of the parable respects the husbandman, rather than the soil in which the seed is sown; for, the seed springeth and groweth up, "*he* knoweth not how." This fact is illustrated in a number of instances—

1. We are conscious of having *sown the seed*, but seldom know for a considerable time whether it has taken root or not. The seed might be cast into the ground under great discouragement, so that the sower had little or no hope of success: yet by and bye it springs and grows up in the mind of one and another of our hearers, of whom we thought nothing at the time. Like the husbandman we are pursuing our daily course, and when we afterwards return to the field that was formerly sown, the seed is sprung up.

2. Much of the seed may be cast where its growth never comes *within the sphere of our observation.* Many of the Lord's servants have scattered the seed in different and in distant parts of the world, where they are never likely to see any of its effects. The husbandman has sown it, and left it to the care of heaven: nevertheless it springeth and groweth up, he knoweth not how.

3. Many of the seeds spring up *after the sower is dead*, or removed from the field of labour; and so he may never know the extent of his usefulness. This is exemplified in a number of instances, so as fully to justify that saying, One soweth, and another reapeth. The righteous rest from their labours, and their works do follow them. John iv. 37, 38. Rev. xiv. 13.

4. The *growth of the seed itself* is carried on in the same imperceptible manner. We rise up, and retire to rest, and know but little how things are working in the minds of others. There may be many strong convictions, and yieldings of heart to the gospel, that we know not of, and where we least expect it.

All these things are so ordered, to hide pride from man, and to teach us to go on in our work in faith and hope, looking forward to the harvest of the great day. Let us only be diligent and faithful, and sow plentifully; and we shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. Gal. vi. 8, 9.

THE FAITHFUL SERVANT'S REWARD.

In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began.—Titus i. 2.

The principal design of Paul in this epistle was to instruct and encourage Timothy in the ministry of the word. The work itself is arduous, and attended with many difficulties; and the aged Paul is well qualified to give to this evangelist the requisite instruction and advice.

(1) He reminds him of the *character* which he himself sustained, as "a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ." This was the highest honour that Paul sought, and his being such would give authority and dignity to his address, ver, 1—3.

(2) The apostle states the *doctrine* which he delivered: it was "according to the faith of God's elect." It was no new doctrine; and though delivered with greater clearness than formerly, it was substantially the faith of old-testament saints, and embraced "the truth which is after godliness."

(3) The *reward* which he expected at the end of his labours was, "eternal life." Though as a servant of Christ he suffered much in his cause, yet he looked for an ample recompense, and should not be disappointed.

(4) The *authority* under which he acted was, "the commandment of God our Saviour." The gospel which Paul delivered, he received immediately from Christ, and not from any of his brethren. Gal. i. 12.

The blessing which Paul anticipated was not peculiar to him as an apostle, though it had some respect to his public work, but is applicable to all the Lord's servants, and as such we shall proceed to consider it.

I. The work to which the Lord calls his servants has a reward connected with it, even the promise of eternal life.

We are not required to serve him for nought, nor to say, What shall it profit us? There is a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give to all that love his appearing. Christ will not be indebted to any for their services, but will give them an ample recompense.

1. The Lord does not give *a present reward* so much as a future one; the blessing is not in possession, but in hope. There is indeed a sweetness in the work itself, so much so that every one who cordially enters into his service would rather continue in it for ever, than go out free any more; yet the better part is still to come. It is a hope laid up for them in heaven, and they must live upon the promises till the substance comes.

2. Though the reward is chiefly in prospect, yet this is more than can be said of *the service of sin*, or of the world. Sin promises much, but yields nothing. The servants of satan shall indeed have their reward, but the wages of sin is death, and they have nothing be-

fore them but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. All the present sweetness of sin will turn to bitterness at last, and all its present pleasures to everlasting pain and anguish. Prov. xxiii. 32. Multitudes become the voluntary slaves of the world, and follow it with all their might, but it is like setting their eyes on that which is not. All the good it promises is uncertain; the greater part of those who seek it never obtain it, and those who do, are often known to lose it when they have done, for riches make themselves wings and fly away. At best the rewards of the world are only for a little time; all vanish at death, and are seen no more. The good it bestows, disappoints the expectation, even while possessed; and after death there is no other portion. How different from all this is the prospect of the servants of God! Theirs is a rich and enduring substance, a certain and eternal reward.

3. Consider the unspeakable *magnitude of the blessing hoped for*, it is nothing less than "eternal life." Though an object of hope, it is worth waiting for; and who can tell what is comprised in such a gift? 1 Cor. ii. 9. It includes a deliverance from the second death, and from the wrath to come; and who can conceive the magnitude and importance of such a deliverance? Eternal life consists in knowing God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent; in knowing even as we are known, and in having intimate nearness and communion with the Father and the Son; in being made one with God, and all holy beings. What then are crowns and kingdoms compared with this!

4. The solid *ground on which this hope depends*, even the promise of "him that cannot lie." Eternal life, though a reward following upon our services, is not properly the fruit of them, but is still a matter of promise, and therefore of free grace. But the promise is sure, for God cannot deny himself, or be unrighteous to forget his own engagements. Num. xxiii. 19. Heb. vi. 10, 18. He will never repent of having promised too much, or alter the word that is gone out of his mouth. Rom. xi. 29.

5. To add still more to its certainty, and the stability of our hope, the promise was made *before the world began.* To whom was the promise made but to Jesus, in whom all the promises are yea and amen, to the glory of God by us. Eternal life was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began. 2 Tim. i. 9. This implies the pre-existence of Christ, that he is before all things, and by him all things consist. Col. i. 17, 18.

II. The encouragement which this hope affords to such as are engaged in the work of the Lord.

If devoted to his service, we shall meet with many difficulties and discouragements, but the hope of the gospel will support us under all.

1. If we are engaged in *bearing witness to the truth*, in labouring to promote it, and seeking the salvation of others, we may meet with no other reward than reproach and contempt, even from those whose welfare we wish to seek. But be it so, we may cheerfully look for a better recompense by and bye. When the Lord shall come, our hopes will

be fully realised; and this may support us under all our present difficulties.

2. If engaged *in following Christ*, and keeping his commands, we may expect to meet with some opposition. Our attachment to Christ may loosen the bonds of human friendship, and we may be called to suffer loss. But if so, the loss will not be great, in comparison of Christ, even if it included the loss of all things. Phil. iii. 8. It was this which supported the mind of Paul, who valued not his own life for the sake of the Lord Jesus. Acts xxi. 13.

How important then to realise the object of the believer's hope to animate and encourage us in every season of difficulty and distress. 2 Cor. iv. 16—18. What a motive also to fidelity and perseverance to the end of life. Rev. ii. 10.

DANGER OF SINNING AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.—Ephesians iv. 30.

There is no epistle of the New Testament more fraught with doctrine than this, and none in which the duties of christianity are urged with stronger motives. The dissuasion in the text is expressed with the utmost tenderness, and so as to convey a direct appeal to the heart. The sin of grieving the Holy Spirit is one of which none of us are clear, and to some it may more especially be applicable.

I. Endeavour to explain the subject.

The term "grieve" is not taken literally, but metaphorically. It is God speaking after the manner of men, that it may be suited to our comprehension. The character under which the Holy Spirit is here considered, is that of a father or a friend; for it is love only that can produce grief, which is generally the effect of unrequited kindness. In an enemy, our misconduct produces anger, and gives offence; but in one that loves us, it produces sorrow and grief.

By the tender language of the text we are reminded of what the Spirit of God hath done for us, and of the love which his condescension implies. He strove with us by his word, producing repeated convictions in our consciences; he never left us till he brought us to the Saviour, and we were born again. Let us also recollect what he has done for us as a Sanctifier, and a Comforter, for all is to be ascribed to his blessed influence. 1 Cor. vi. 11. What joy, what hope has he inspired; and yet what returns have we made for all his lovingkindness and tender mercy!

II. Consider some of the instances in which we are in danger of sinning against the Holy Spirit.

1. We grieve the Spirit *when we neglect the Holy Scriptures*, which he has indited. It is owing to his sacred influence that we have a revelation of the divine will, holy men of old speaking as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. That unbelievers, in whose consciences he strives, should treat the lively oracles with indifference or contempt, is highly offensive; but if those in whom he dwells should do so in any degree, it is grievous, and deeply to be lamented. Yet if we compare our love to the sacred word, with that affection which saints of old bore towards it, we shall find ourselves awfully defective. Job. xxiii. 12. Psal. cxix. 20. Jer. xv. 16. When we slight the ordinances of the gospel, which are the means of communicating the influences of the Spirit, we may be said to grieve the Comforter, and to offend our best and only friend.

2. We grieve the Spirit when we are *not importunate for larger measures of his holy influence.* God has promised his Holy Spirit to them that ask, and will give freely as a father does to his children; yet we content ourselves too much, without asking for larger communications of his grace. We read of the communion of the Holy Ghost; yet how little of it do we enjoy, and how little concerned about it.

3. When we labour after spiritual knowledge, *without a humble dependence upon divine teaching*, we grieve the Holy Spirit of God. This undoubtedly is the cause of much error and darkness in the church of God, and is one of the great temptations of the christian ministry. How prone are we to speculate on divine truth, though all the researches of men are vain, without an unction from the Holy One. 1 John ii. 20. No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. 1 Cor. xii. 3. Yet how much unsanctified knowledge is found amongst us, and how little dependence upon divine teaching: no wonder therefore if the Holy Spirit leaves men to err, and to wander from the truth.

4. When we feel *self-sufficient for the service of God*, for resisting temptation, or bearing affliction, we grieve the Holy Spirit. On each of these occasions we need fresh communications of grace, and to pray with the psalmist, Uphold me with thy free Spirit. Yet how prone are we to forget our dependence upon God, and to go in our own strength: and when it is so, the Holy Spirit is grieved, and departs from us.

5. When he has long *withheld his blessing from the means of grace*, and we do not lament after him as Israel did, the Holy Spirit shows that he is grieved. If he withdraws from us as a people, or as individuals, and we can be content to have it so, it is an awful sign, and it becomes us to be alarmed. Hos. ix. 12. 1 Sam. vii. 2.

6. If we *indulge in worldly and sinful tempers*, such as are mentioned in connection with the text, we shall grieve the Holy Spirit, ver. 29, 31. He will quickly depart from the abodes of noise and strife, and will dwell only with the humble and the contrite.

The effect of these things is, a withdrawment from us, as a kind

friend whose goodness has been abused. He will silently depart, and our house will be left unto us desolate; as individuals we shall have no spiritual enjoyment, and the ordinances will be as dry breasts. We may keep up the credit of our profession, but we shall only have the form of godliness, without the power. The Holy Spirit will withdraw his influence in prayer, and that will become barren; in hearing the word, and that will be unprofitable. He will also leave us to the power of temptation, unbefriended and alone: then we shall be in danger of falling into sin, and into endless perdition.

III. Observe the tender dissuasive mentioned in the text. Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, "whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

There is a wide difference between the strivings of the Spirit, in the consciences of unbelievers, and his "sealing" of the saints. The first is common to those who attend the gospel, the last is peculiar to such as receive the truth in love; the one is before believing, the other is consequent upon it. Ephes. i. 13.

When God gives his Holy Spirit to dwell in us, it is setting his seal upon us, and marking us out for his own. It also denotes the value that he puts upon his saints, who are sealed in order to their being distinguished and preserved in times of danger. Ezek. ix. 4. So when the wrath of God is to be poured out upon the seat of the beast, the servants of God are to be sealed, to denote their security. Rev. vii. 3. They are sealed and secured through all the temptations of the world, through death till the resurrection, and so "to the day of final redemption." Rom. viii. 23.

This furnishes a powerful motive to avoid the evil, of which we are warned in the text. If we have any gratitude, any love, or ingenuousness, let us not grieve the Holy Spirit, who has done so much for us, and to whose influence we are indebted for complete salvation.

If the Holy Spirit is grieved with those in whom he dwells, and seals as heirs of heaven: he will finally depart from those in whom he only strives, and then their doom is sealed for ever.

THE HAND OF GOD TO BE SEEN IN OUR AFFLICTIONS.

Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?—Amos iii. 6.

The more we see of the hand of God in the concerns of this life, the better it will be for us; otherwise we shall not learn wisdom by the things that are before us. It was the sin of this people, that under the most awful judgments they were totally insensible, and disregarded the operation of God's hand. The design of the prophet therefore was to

awaken them to a sense of their condition, that they might see the rod, and him that had appointed it.

I. Establish and illustrate the truth taught us in the text: that whatever calamities afflict a nation or individuals, they all proceed from the hand of God.

This generally acknowledged truth is often practically denied, or denied by implication, especially in two instances—

1. When we see *no natural cause* for what befals us, we are ready to ascribe it to mere accident. When our plans have been well concerted, and the means of their accomplishment have failed; instead of suspecting that the hand of God is against us to defeat the enterprise, we are ready to impute it to some unknown cause, or to imagine that it arose from chance. Eccles. ix. 11.

2. When *second causes are apparent*, we are apt to overlook the first. We may see indeed much to blame in the conduct of mankind, as the source of innumerable evils; still it becomes us to remember that their infliction is of the Lord. To study the changes in nations as man's work, or as under the influence of second causes, is the proper science of politics; but to view them as God's work, and as filling up a part of the system of providence and of prophecy, is the object of true religion. Psal. cvii. 43. There is a greatness in the works of God, corresponding with the grandeur of his nature, and every thing is done on a large scale. All that statesmen and warriors are doing in the world, form a part of his great design, and are like the wheels in a vast and complicated machine, superintended and directed by unerring wisdom, to send abroad his judgments in the earth, in answer to the prayers of his people. Psal. lxv. 5.

3. There are *three great evils in particular*, with which nations and cities are visited, but where the hand of the Lord is generally overlooked. Pestilential diseases are attendant on populous places; and though very properly attributed to seasons and climates, and other physical causes; yet the hand of the Lord ought not to be overlooked. They are his servants, and fulfil his pleasure, in punishing mankind for their iniquities. Famine is also an evil which befal cities; and this is generally attributed to an unproductive soil, or unfavourable seasons; yet if God does not hear the heavens, they will be as brass, and the earth as iron under our feet. Hos. ii. 21, 22. We have been greatly exempted from this calamity, but God may have other evils in reserve for us. War is another of those scourges by which towns and cities have been desolated. The world has never been at rest since man has been upon it, sin has made it as a troubled sea. There have been continual strivings for conquest and for power, but these have been overruled for higher ends than what the immediate agents had in view. If God determines to punish the world for its iniquities, he raises up an Alexander or a Cesar, or permits some tyrant to fill a throne, and the work is done. Dan. iv. 17.

II. Improve the subject.

1. If these evils be of God, *there is a cause*, for God is righteous, and

it becomes us to examine into the cause of all the evils that befal us.

In a national capacity, self-interest has long been the governing principle, instead of public virtue, and the public weal; and among the higher classes, scepticism and infidelity have awfully prevailed. And shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this, saith the Lord?

2. If all our afflictions and calamities be of God, we may expect to find *something in his word* resembling our case, for God has recorded his former dealings with mankind as an example and a warning to us.

In general we have a brief history of the rise and fall of empires as of Egypt, Babylon, Greece and Rome. These were once in their glory, and said, 'I sit as queen, and shall see no sorrow;' yet where now are they? Prosperity, producing pride and oppression, became their ruin; and will be the ruin of all other nations that resemble them. Ezek. xxviii. 15—19.

3. If our afflictions are of God, it becomes us *to return to him*, and to humble ourselves in his sight. It is only in this way that afflictions can either be sanctified or removed, and then they will come to a happy issue at last. Isai. lviii. 6—10.

THE RIGHTEOUS A BLESSING TO THE WORLD.

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he that winneth souls is wise.—Proverbs xi. 30.

The two parts of this text serve to explain each other. The first is general, and denotes that a righteous man is a blessing to those about him. The last is more particular, teaching us that a good man is in many instances the means of winning souls to God, and to the love of true religion; and that where this is the case, it is a sign of heavenly wisdom.

The imagery of the text is probably taken from the tree of life in paradise, to which Christ himself is compared, Rev. ii. 7: and in a subordinate sense his people are represented under the same figure.

Two remarks will tend to illustrate and confirm the truth taught us in the text—

I. That good men in general are a blessing to those about them: "their fruit is like that of the tree of life."

There are some indeed who think themselves "righteous," and are thought so by others, but who are mere cumberers of the ground, bringing forth no "fruit" to God, and none for the benefit of mankind. He only that doeth righteousness is righteous in God's account, and should be so in ours; and in such characters the language of the text is verified. 1 John iii. 7.

1. The habitual course of a righteous man *is to do right*, and this in itself is a great blessing. In a selfish and unjust world, a man that fears God excites confidence; he becomes a blessing to his immediate connections, to the church of God, and to the world. Whatever station he may occupy in life, the uprightness of his example cannot fail to have a beneficial influence, and to give a tone to public morals.

2. It will be the way of the righteous *to do good*, as well as to do what is right. A man may be upright in his dealings with others, and yet be neither generous nor kind: but to be truly righteous before God, we must live for the good of others, as well as for ourselves. Inordinate self-love, and caring for their own interest, is but too evident in some; but he that lives to himself, lives not to God. On the contrary, some are seen and known to be a tree of life to the poor and to the oppressed, and their prosperity is a public blessing.

3. A righteous man is not only careful to do good, but he *intercedes with God* for those about him, and God often blesses them in answer to his prayers. Abraham had served the king and the people of Sodom with his arms, and afterwards endeavoured to save them from ruin by his intercession; and had there been but ten righteous in the city, it would have availed. So the Lord blessed Laban for Jacob's sake, and Egypt for Joseph's sake. Gen. xxx. 27. 1. 20.

4. The righteous, by their *influence and example*, are often known to preserve a whole community from destruction. So long as Lot was in Sodom the city was preserved, and Zoar was spared for his sake. Jerusalem was safe while the disciples were there, but when they departed it was beseiged and overthrown. When good people are banished from any country by persecution, it soon becomes ripe for ruin.

5. The righteous are ready to impart *counsel and advice* of the highest importance to their fellow sinners, in the time of their extremity, and at the hour of death. By their prayers and instructions many have been converted from the error of their way, and saved from a multitude of sins. In this also they are a tree of life, yielding fruit for the good of others. James v. 15, 20.

6. If these things are true of righteous men in general, how much more of *that Righteous One*, who lived and died for us. He was indeed the friend of the poor and of the oppressed, the guilty and undone. He alone is the tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. Rev. xxii. 2.

II. Righteous men are not only general blessings, but in many cases they are instrumental in "winning souls" to God, and so prove themselves to be truly wise.

Men of the world are seeking to gain that on which their hearts are set; one in making a fortune, and another in acquiring fame; but the truly wise are seeking to win souls to Christ, as the highest object of their ambition. Dan. xii. 3. The souls of men are lost by sin, like the captives taken by the kings of Sodom; and he that recovers them is like Abraham who rescued Lot.

Souls are won to Christ by various means, some of which are the following—

1. The *ministry of the word.* This is ordinarily the power of God unto salvation; and that preaching and doctrine which tends most to accomplish this end, is both the wisest and the best. Men indeed would judge differently, and determine this matter by the excellency of the composition, the elegance of the style, and the gracefulness of the delivery; but God prizes that most which comes from the heart, and is addressed to the consciences of men. Such was the ministry of the apostles, which was so eminently successful. 2 Cor. iv. 2. Like Abraham's servant, who went to seek a wife for Isaac, their object was to espouse souls to Christ; and to this they sacrificed every other consideration. 2 Cor. xi. 2. A man may gain some fame as a scholar or an orator, he may gain admirers, and attach many to his interest; but that is not the wisdom which cometh from above, nor is any thing deserving of the name that does not tend to the conversion and salvation of men.

2. Another means of winning souls to Christ, is *spiritual and seasonable conversation.* He who is able to speak a word in season, and is of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord, is the wisest teacher. Many souls have been won by words addressed to them under trouble, suited to their case and circumstances, for then it is that God opens the ear to receive instruction; also when labouring under a sense of guilt and condemnation. When any one has found mercy, his next duty is to go to his kindred, and tell what great things the Lord has done for him. Luke viii. 39. Many have been brought in this way to seek the Lord in earnest. A little maid of the land of Israel was the means of saving her master, by telling him of the prophet Elisha. 2 Kings v. 3.

3. A *wise and holy conduct* is an effectual means of winning others to the love of true religion. This has often proved successful, where the ministry of the word has failed. 1 Pet. iii. 1. There is that in a truly christian conversation which silently makes its way to the conscience, and even to the hearts of such as are strangers to God. It affords such a proof of the reality of religion, that there is no arguing against it; but men are constrained to say, God is with them of a truth. By exhibiting the beauty of holiness, unbelievers are made to feel their disparity, and the evil is overcome with good.

How thankful ought we to be, that the Lord has still in the midst of us a few that are faithful; who are the salt of the earth, the leaven that shall leaven the whole lump. Had he not planted these trees of righteousness, the whole world would have been nothing but a wilderness.

PRAYER FOR PERSEVERING GRACE.

The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, oh Lord, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands.—Psalm cxxxviii. 8.

David appears to have been in a very happy frame of mind when he wrote this psalm; he is filled with a grateful recollection of past mercies, and hopes for deliverance and support in time to come. The prayer offered in the text is expressive both of holy confidence and fervent desire, and his assurance of persevering grace is accompanied with a deep sense of his dependence upon God.

I. Enquire in what instances the Lord will perfect "that which concerneth us."

Not in every instance, much less in that which is evil. Nor in things relating merely to the present life: these may be added to the believer's inheritance, though they form no essential part of it, and God has not made them the subject of any direct promise, however great our concern may be about them.

1. The concern which the Lord will perfect must be a religious one, and yet *not every concern relating to religion.* Every one is concerned to escape misery, for this is natural; and the concern of some persons under their first convictions is merely of this kind. The young ruler was anxious to know what he must do to inherit eternal life, but he loved the world better than the Saviour. The deep concern that is sometimes felt on these occasions may issue in what is better or it may not; but there is no promise made to any thing that is not spiritual good. The mere enquiry, What shall I do to be saved, may excite hope in those who behold it; but the promise is to nothing short of believing. It is not our being weary and heavy laden, or our being weary of a load of guilt, but coming to Christ with our burden, that will give us rest.

2. There are many things which concern *a good man*, but which *will never be perfected*, though they may be such upon the whole as God approves. A minister may be greatly concerned for the salvation of his hearers, and yet many of them die in unbelief. A parent for the conversion of his children, and yet that concern may never be perfected. Paul longed and prayed for the salvation of his countrymen, and yet his testimony was rejected. A good man like David may desire to build a house for God, and God may take it well that it was in his heart, though the opportunity be not afforded. In all these cases, where the divine glory is the object, God may approve the motive, though the desire be not granted.

3. The concern to which *the text refers*, and which the Lord will perfect, has three characters by which it may be known. It was something which David calls "the work of God's hand," something that was yet imperfect, and that was matter of promise: and to what can these characters apply, but to the progress of a work of grace upon the soul?

(1) A work of grace is eminently the work of *God's own hand.* He only can renew the heart of a sinner, by the effectual working of his mighty power: hence when many turned to the Lord under the apostles' preaching, it is ascribed to the hand of the Lord being with them. Acts xi. 21. Man can form and transform by various means, but God only can transform us into his own image. If we are made to see the glory of the Lord in the face of Jesus Christ, it is by his shining into the heart. If brought to repentance, it is by his taking away the heart of stone, and giving us hearts of flesh. Ministers may persuade and beseech, but God only can reconcile sinners to himself. 2 Cor. iv. 6. Ephes. i. 19. ii. 8. Phil. ii. 13.

(2) The work to which David refers is supposed to be *imperfect at present,* and this is true of every part of the work of grace upon the heart. If we know any thing of Christ, it is only in part. If we truly believe, we still have much remaining unbelief. If we love the things of God, we still have reason to lament that we love no more. If sanctified, it is only in part, and not wholly, in spirit, soul, and body. 1 Thess. v. 23.

(3) The *progress* of this work is matter of *promise.* It is a work in which "mercy" and faithfulness are concerned: "thy mercy, oh Lord, endureth forever." He that hath begun the good work will perform it: he is able also to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory. Phil. i. 6. Jude 24.

Now the *perfection* of this work is the principal "concern" of every one who is the subject of it. Paul's great desire was to apprehend that for which he was apprehended of Christ Jesus; to know him, and to be wholly conformed to his image and likeness. Phil. iii. 10—12.

The prayer of David however need not be confined to the work of grace in the hearts of individual believers, for it will equally apply to *the kingdom of grace in general.* This also is the "work of his own hands:" he has laid the foundation, and his hand also shall finish it. It is at present imperfect, and the edifice is not complete. The seed is sown, but the harvest is not come; it is sown on the top of a mountain, and it puts forth the blade and the ear; but by and bye the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon. Psal. lxxii. 16.

The *perfection* of this work is also the great "concern" of all good men. It is what they pray for, and labour to promote. Thy kingdom come: Let the people praise thee, oh Lord, yea let all the people praise thee.

This work has also the *promise* of being perfected, for the Lord will build up Zion, and appear in his glory. David died in the faith of it, and all the saints are looking for its accomplishment. Isai. ix. 7. Zech. iv. 7.

II. Observe the grounds on which we are warranted to pray and hope that God will perfect the work in which his people are so much concerned.

1. The *perpetuity of his mercy,* warrants this expectation.

Having loved his own, he loves them to the end. God in setting his

love upon us at first, did not consider our worthiness; therefore our unworthiness will not remove it, and this is ground for consolation. God changes not, therefore we are not consumed. If his mercy towards us endured while we were strangers, and enemies by wicked works; much more now we are friends, and reconciled through his Son.

2. The *nature of the work itself* gives us reason to hope that it will be perfected. It is the work of "his own hands," and there is a perfection which belongs to all his works. He is a rock, and his work is perfect: what he sets his hand to, he will not leave unfinished, nor suffer his purpose to be frustrated. That great work especially, for which all other works are made, cannot fail of being accomplished.

Hence our encouragement to pray as David did; the promise, the mercy, the faithfulness of God, all conspire to strengthen our faith and hope.

GOD THE PORTION OF HIS PEOPLE.

The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.—Lamentations iii. 24.

The Lamentations of Jeremiah are very plaintive, and we here see the prophet weeping as it were over the grave of Jerusalem. His tears however are not those of a patriot merely, but of a man of God: he loved Zion, and lamented her fall, and mourns over the city of the Lord of hosts.

(1) The prophet dwells on what had been *his distress* on Zion's account, ver. 1—18; showing to his countrymen that he was their companion in tribulation.

(2) He dwells on *the use* which the recollection of it was to him, producing both humility and hope, ver. 19—21; and this would teach them what use to make of their own sorrows.

(3) The prophet exhibits many *conciliating truths*, which cheered him under all, and might also cheer their hearts, ver. 22—36.

Considering the desolate condition of Judah in her captivity, there is wonderful force in the language of the text. They had lost their privileges, their property, their liberty, and their friends, by the famine and the sword; and every earthly hope was utterly destroyed. But now, "the Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him."

I. Explain what is meant by a "portion."

In general it signifies a part or lot, or whatever constitutes our happiness or well-being in the present life.

1. It is put for the allotments of Israel in the land of Canaan, which are called their portion: and David, in allusion to this, makes an esti-

mate of his religious privileges, and finds in them a much richer inheritance. Psal. xvi. 5, 6.

2. The term is sometimes applied to agreeable connections in social life, which form one of the principal sources of enjoyment in the present world. Eccles. ix. 9. Now God is all this and much more to us, better than corn and wine, better than sons and daughters, yea than life itself. Psal. iv. 6, 7. lxiii. 3.

3. A cheerful heart in our various labours and pursuits in life, is represented by the wise man as a highly valuable portion. Eccles. ii. 10. Now God is all this to us: he gives us joy and gladness, and becomes himself our chief delight.

4. It is sometimes put for that pleasing interest we take in all that is done and doing in the world around us, and hence the dead are said to have no portion in all that is done under the sun. Eccles. ix. 5, 6. But God is the substitute of all this, and is more to us than all that can interest us in the present world.

II. Enquire what is included in our being able to adopt the language of the text: "the Lord is my portion, saith my soul."

This appropriating language could never have been used, had we been left under the ruins of the fall; nor can it in truth be used by any, except those [illegible] who believe in Christ.

1. It supposes a Mediator, and *a covenant of grace* through him. Man as a sinner has no portion in God; but being an enemy by wicked works, he is the object of divine displeasure. But God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Now therefore he becomes the portion of his people, and enters into covenant with them through the Mediator, saying, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Heb. viii. 10.

2. In order to adopt the langauge of the text in truth, it is necessary that we *choose the Lord for our God*, and relinquish every other good for his sake. If the world rules in our hearts, and we are under its influence, we have no portion in God; for where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. We must count all things but loss for Christ, must love him better than all created good, and even life itself.

III. Consider some of the peculiar properties of this portion.

1. *Its fulness.* He that possesses this inherits all things. This was the consolation of Levi, Deut. x. 9; and it was the glory of Joseph's portion, that it included the goodwill of him that dwelt in the bush: xxxiii. 16. The firstborn of Israel had a double portion; and all believers, who are God's firstborn, have the same. Rom. viii. 17. There is enough in God to meet and satisfy all the wants of an immortal soul, and he hath so formed us that nothing but himself can fill and satisfy us. Psal. cvii. 9. There is so much in this portion as to leave no room for monopoly, any more than for the sun or the ocean, whose fulness is not diminished by diffusion.

2. *Its security.* Nothing on earth is secure: riches make themselves

wings and fly away. Adversity may destroy all our hopes, and death will take us from them; but if our portion be in God, our treasure is safe, and no changes in this evil world can affect it. Matt. vi. 20. Col. iii. 3.

3. *Its duration.* The great defect in all earthly good is, that at best it is only transitory, and soon vanishes away. We therefore need a portion that is commensurate with the whole of our existence, and God himself alone is that portion.

IV. The adaptedness of this to support and comfort us under all the ills of the present life: "therefore will I hope in him."

In various instances we can derive but little hope from any other quarter: but if the Lord be our portion, we may indeed hope in him.

It was this hope which preserved the church in captivity, and it will preserve us from despondency, under the most distressing circumstances. Psal. xlii. 5. It will sustain us in the absence of all created good. Hab. iii. 17, 18. Under the loss of our dearest friends and connections. Job i. 21. Psal. xviii. 46. Even under those distresses which come upon us for our sins. Jonah ii. 4. And in the prospect of death itself. 2 Cor. v. 1.

MOSES'S INVITATION TO HOBAB.

And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses's father-in-law, We are journeying unto the place which the Lord said, I will give it you. Come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.—Numbers x. 29.

Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses, appears to have been of the family of Abraham, and to have acknowledged the God of Abraham and of Israel. He had been with the tribes to mount Sinai, and now purposed to return home to the wilderness of Kedesh.

(1) Observe, Moses gives Hobab a *kind invitation* to cast in his lot with the people of Israel, promising to "do him good;" and probably this was intended as a recompense for his past services. Exod. xviii.

(2) Moses reminds him on *what grounds* they had to expect good things. We are not going, as if he had said on an uncertainty, after we know not what, nor yet like marauders for the sake of plunder; but "we are journeying to the place which the Lord hath promised, and the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."

(3) Hobab's *objection* to accompany Israel, ver. 30, arose from an attachment to his country and his kindred, and not, we should presume, from any love to idols, though his conduct in this instance too much resembles that of Orpah, instead of Ruth: ch. i. 14—16.

(4) Moses *renews the invitation*, and also adds an entreaty that he would not leave him. He likewise pleads that Hobab might serve Israel in a way that would redound to his honour and happiness, ver. 31.

(5) He also renews his *former assurances*, and promises that he should fare as they did, ver. 32. We are not told what was the result, but it may be hoped that Hobab was persuaded at length to go, for we afterwards find that some of his posterity was with Israel in Canaan. Judges i. 16.

In this simple narrative there are some things *applicable to ourselves.* We have indeed no such country to go to as Israel had, but we have a better country, even a heavenly one, of which Canaan was a kind of type; and we are on a journey towards it as well as they. Like Moses we do not wish to go alone, nor to have the good land to ourselves; but would gladly have others to go with us, and partake of all the good things which the Lord hath promised to his people. We also have authority to invite others to go with us. The Spirit and the bride say come, and whosoever will, let him come.

Let us therefore address the invitation of Moses to such as have not yet set out for the heavenly Canaan, and who may still be hesitating on the subject.

Some of you have seen those of your kindred and acquaintance setting out for the heavenly world; you have seen them forsake the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season, in the hope of eternal life; and what do you say? Will you go with us, and cast in your lot with the people of God?

I. Consider some of the good things which the Lord has promised to his people, and of which you are invited to partake.

It is almost needless to say, that these good things do not relate to *the present world.* If they did, many would be willing to go, who now are not inclined. The blessings we seek are far superior to any of these, as the fruits of Canaan were to the briars of the wilderness. All things here are mixed with sorrow, but those in prospect are without alloy. The best of earthly blessings are given sparingly, but the good we seek is unbounded. The things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal.

Again: though the good things promised to us do not relate to the present world, yet *neither are they wholly confined to another world*, and you will not have to wait till death before you enjoy them. Godliness has the promise of the life that now is, and also of that which is to come. Israel had their cloudy pillar by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night, and upon all the glory was there a defence. They also had their manna in the wilderness, and so have we, even that living bread which came down from heaven. Real christians have their good things in this life, the pardon of sin, and peace with God. Even now are they the sons of God, though it doth not yet appear what they shall be. A special providence attends them through life, all things work together for their good, and Christ is in them the hope of glory. "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good."

II. Enquire what answer you will give to this invitation.

You must give some answer, you cannot be neutral: choose ye this day whom you will serve.

1. Some have given a direct *negative*, like the first reply of Hobab: "I will not go." Some like Ephraim are joined to idols, and cannot give them up: but is this your answer? If it be, you must perish in the wilderness.

2. Some have been in *suspense*, scarcely knowing what answer to give. They would like to go to Canaan, but do not like the perils of the wilderness. After the example of Orpah they have turned back with reluctance, to their country and their gods; or like Esau, have sold their birthright for a mess of pottage.

3. A few are desirous of going, but *do not know the way*, or fear they should be wrong. John xiv. 5, 6. Enquire then the way to Zion with your faces thitherward; stand in the way and see, and ask for the good old paths; go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock. Jer. vi. 16. l. 4, 5. Cant. i. 7, 8. There is not a patriarch, nor a prophet, nor an apostle, nor a real christian any where, but he can tell you the way.

4. Some are willing to go, but *but have not counted the cost.* Such was the case whith many of our Lord's followers, who set out, but turned back, and walked no more with him. John vi. 66.

5. There are a few who have *resolved to go*, in the strength of the Lord God. Like Ruth, nothing shall hinder them; and like Paul, they count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. Ruth i. 16. Heb. xi. 25, 26.

III. Observe what is included in a cordial acceptance of the invitation.

If you journey to the heavenly Canaan, it must include at least three things—

1. That you take *the God of Israel* for your God, leaving all your idols, and cleaving alone to him. Can you then forsake all for Christ's sake.

2. That you choose *the people of God* for your companions, and esteem them as the excellent of the earth. Shall you then be willing to cast in your lot with them, and to fare as they fare? If you go to Canaan, you must follow the camp.

3. That you devote yourself unreservedly to *the service of God;* you must take his yoke upon you, and count it a blessing to wear it. This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grevious. 1 John v. 3.

THE TRIUMPHANT ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast recceived gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.—Psalm lxviii. 18.

The kingdom of Israel, which had been greatly agitated and distressed, during the government of the judges and the reign of Saul, was established in the hands of David, who subdued his enemies round about. In a time of great tranquility the ark is carried up to mount Zion, where God fixes the seat of worship, and dwells among his people. All this is regarded as the ascension of a mighty conqueror, who now returns with the spoils of victory, to distribute them amongst his friends. In this light also the ascension of Christ is considered, and an apostle understands the text as a symbolical prediction of that great event. Ephes. iv. 8.

I. The ascension of Christ is represented as the result of a glorious victory, obtained over the powers of darkness.

"Thou hast led captivity captive," made captives of those who had taken us captive. The entry of Cyrus into Babylon bore a distant resemblance to this, when he proclaimed liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; though in a superior sense it is applicable to the Saviour. Isai. lxi. 1.

The grand enemy by whom we were led captive is Satan, and the chain by which we are bound is our own sin. Herein all his power lies: if this be broken, our liberty is at once obtained. If there were no iniquity in Jacob, the enemy could have no influence over him.

By means of the original apostacy, Satan has caused even God to become our enemy, and to pass upon us the sentence of death and condemnation. Satan now has the power of death; and the sinner being held and bound by the sentence of the law, the captive is secure, and will soon become his prey.

But thanks be to God, by the blood of atonement we are made free; the ransom price is paid, and the lawful captive is delivered. Hence also death itself is ours, and all is made subservient to them that believe. the weakest christian may now triumph, and the lame may take the prey. Christ has led captivity captive, and dragged his enemies at his chariot wheels. He not only spoiled principalities and powers, but made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross, and much more in his ascension to glory. Col. ii. 15.

II. When Christ ascended, he is represented as dividing among his faithful subjects, the spoils of victory.

"Thou hast received gifts for men," even as David made presents to his friends when he ascended the throne of Israel. All our privileges

and blessings, both temporal and spiritual, are the gift of Christ. Religious ordinances, means of grace, a standing ministry, together with the hopes and promises of eternal life, are given in consequence of his ascension to the right hand of God.

Of this there was an eminent instance in the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of pentecost, when such a profusion of gifts was bestowed on the apostles, the benefit of which we enjoy to the present day.

The gifts which Christ thus "gave" unto men, he first of all "received;" they are the spoils which he took from the enemy, and afterwards rendered subservient to the purposes of his own glory Ephes. iv. 11. 12.

There is much grace in all this, for the blessings are given to "the rebellious," even to those who had joined the cause of Satan. It is not usual to divide the spoil amongst enemies, yet Christ did this, and even many of his murderers were made partakers.

III. The issue of all is, a state of settled peace.

"The Lord God now dwells among them," even among those who had been "rebellious," turning his enemies into friends, and reconciling them fully unto himself, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

He now dwells amongst us by his word and ordinances, making his church, and every individual believer, his habitation through the Spirit. His dwelling with us also denotes a state of friendship, and of holy intercourse. He takes up his abode with us that he may supply all our wants, and enrich us with his own fulness. It is not a transient visit, like that of a wayfaring man who tarries only for a night, but a permanent and lasting abode. He will dwell in us, and walk in us, that we may be his people, and that he may be our God. 2 Cor. vi. 16.

All this is in consequence of the triumphant ascension of Christ, after having defeated the powers of darkness. When sin entered into the world, God left it as a desolate heritage; but now a way is opened for his return, and dwelling again with man upon the earth.

(1) Let us consider how much the means of grace, and all other blessings are endeared to us, by their being the purchase of Christ's blood.

(2) If God dwells among his people, let us make his church our home, and dwell there all the days of our life.

(3) As Christ overcame all his enemies, so shall his people overcome theirs, and then ascend to glory as he did.

DISTINGUISHED NATURE OF EVANGELICAL TRUTH.

But ye have not so learned Christ, if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.—Ephesians iv. 20, 21.

Paul once had a most affecting interview, and tender parting, with the elders of the church of Ephesus. Acts xx. 37. Sometime after this he addressed to them this epistle, in which he discovers the most affectionate concern for their welfare. They had heard the gospel from some others of the apostles, as well as from Paul; and now he reminds them what it is to be truly taught of God.

I. We have here a brief description of the true gospel: it is "the truth as it is in Jesus."

1. Observe *the relation which all divine truth bears to Jesus.* It is "in him:" he is the centre of it, and every thing in the gospel relates to the mediation of Christ. Does it make known to us the character of God? It is in the face of Jesus that his real character is seen; it is in him, in his cross, we learn the glory of God's moral government; his obedience and death afford the brightest display of it. 2 Cor. iv. 6. Does it teach us the evil of sin? It is in the cross of Christ that we behold it in the most affecting light. Does the word of truth proclaim mercy and forgiveness, the hope of eternal life, and a glorious resurrection? It is all in Jesus, and centres alone in him. He is our life in this world, and in that which is to come. All practical religion finds its motives in him: here the love of Christ is all in all. That doctrine, and those morals, where Christ is left out, or but lightly regarded are any thing but the gospel. Abstractly considered, the statement may be true, but it is not the truth "as it is in Jesus;" it is another gospel, and not the gospel which Paul preached.

2. The *peculiar qualities of it,* as distinguished from all other truth: "it is in Jesus." There may be truth which is not in Jesus, and which does not immediately relate to the great work of redemption; but if so, it is no part of the gospel. It is mere human wisdom, and not the wisdom of God. The wisdom of men is concerned with mere worldly interests, or scientific researches; but the wisdom that is from above, is imparted by the Holy Spirit. 1 Cor. ii. 4—14. The one is the wisdom of the heart, the other is merely speculative; the one has a divine savour, the other is dry and uninteresting; the one humbles, the other puffeth up. The truth "as it is in Jesus," is the proper subject of the *christian ministry,* and the immediate object of faith. So far as any one deals in this kind of truth, he has to do with the gospel: but so far as other kinds of truth are substituted in its stead, the cross of Christ is made of none effect. And so far as we receive what is foreign from the gospel, our faith stands in the wisdom of men: but in proportion as we receive the truth, simply as it is in Jesus, it stands in the power of God. 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5.

3. The *purity of evangelical truth*, as unmixed with any error. If we learn truth itself from men merely, it cannot fail to be debased with some degree of error. All men, however wise or holy, are liable to mistake. Ministers and teachers are no farther useful than as they direct the eye to Jesus: if we stop short of this, truth itself will have no good effect. We are allowed indeed to learn one of another, so far as we follow Christ; but still he must be our prophet, and our guide. We must draw from the fountain head, and learn of him, who alone is full of grace and truth. Matt. xvii. 5.

II. We have the true manner of receiving the gospel: it is to "hear and learn of Jesus."

There is a very natural gradation in the text; hearing, and being taught by him; as it is said of all that come to Christ, that they have heard and learned of the Father. John vi. 45. We must "hear" in order to "learn," for faith comes by hearing; and we cannot expect to learn, without the means of being taught. But many have heard, and heard in vain; they have heard, but they have not been "taught," and so have "learned" nothing.

The teaching mentioned in the text is inward and effectual, by the Holy Spirit, according to what our Lord said to Simon Peter; 'Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.' Matt. xi. 25. xvi. 17.

The anointing which believers receive from God, teaches them all things, even their need of teaching, and the adaptedness of the gospel especially to their lost condition. Those who have been taught the truth in this way have the witness in themselves, that the gospel is indeed of God, and they will not easily part with it. 1 John ii. 19, 20. John vi. 68.

Such teaching is accompanied with a resignation of ourselves to the Lord, to be taught by him; to sit at his feet, like Mary, and receive the words from his lips.

III. The evidence of our having been thus taught it, is its holy efficacy.

1. There is *a manner of learning Christ* that is peculiar to those who are taught of God. Ye have not "so learned him," says the apostle; not "so," as to continue unsanctified and unholy. The gospel found the Ephesians walking as other gentiles walked, in the vanity of their minds, estranged from God, and given up to work iniquity, ver. 17—19. But having been taught the truth as it is in Jesus, they now put off all these, and put on Christ, by a practical conformity to him, ver. 22—25.

2. If we have not thus learned Christ, we have *not been taught of him*. If in possession of some truth, it is not the truth as it is in Jesus; it is either some false gospel, or a mere speculative acquaintance with the true. We have had our religion from some other quarter, and not from Christ.

BOAZ AND THE REAPERS.

And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee.—Ruth ii. 4.

In addition to the joy so generally occasioned by the harvest season, it seems to have been the custom of the ancient Israelites to offer congratulations to those who enter the field of labour, saying as they passed by, The blessing of the Lord be upon you, we bless you in the name of the Lord. Psal. cxxix. 7, 8. The text presents us with an instance of the kind, well deserving our serious attention.

I. Observe the salutation of Boaz: "The Lord be with you."

1. It is expressive of *the piety of Boaz*, and shows that he was accustomed to carry a savour of religion into the ordinary occupations of life. In a corrupt age such language might be deemed improper, and hypocrites may also have brought it into contempt; but wherever spiritual mindedness prevails in an eminent degree, such forms of speech may be expected to become familiar. The time will arrive when holiness unto the Lord shall be upon the bells of the horses, and upon every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah. Zech. xiv. 20, 21. And in proportion as we cultivate the spirit of true religion, it will pervade all our secular concerns, and give a relish to every enjoyment of life. Prov. vi. 22.

2. The salutation of Boaz exemplifies *his prudence and charity*, as well as his piety. It shows that he chose for his servants such as feared God; and to such he could with propriety address the language of the text. It is a great happiness to have about us those who are of the household of faith, in whom we can place a degree of confidence, and regard with complacency and satisfaction. A family which comprises irreligious characters will either become a scene of confusion, or the interests of religion must be sacrificed in some form or other to preserve its tranquility. Our eyes ought to be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with us; and upon such as walk in a perfect way, that they may serve us; and then we may expect to have a habitation for God. Psal. ci. 6, 7.

3. *The courtesy and kindness of Boaz* towards his servants, is also worthy of attention. Though he was their superior, there is nothing haughty or overbearing in his deportment; he did not come among them for the purpose of finding fault, but to offer with amiable condescension his gratulations. Though the reapers were his servants, they were also the Lord's freemen, and he regards them accordingly. Such a master gives a striking illustration of the apostle's precept, and is worthy of double honour. Ephes. vi. 9. Col. iv. 1.

4. The *appropriateness of his salvation*; "The Lord be with you." It included every temporal good; he wished them health and strength for labour; but chiefly that they might be favoured with the

divine presence. This would sweeten all their toil, and fill their hearts with joy and gladness. Eccles. ix. 7. And as they were poor men, labouring in the field of another, the presence of God would be more to them, than if the harvest had been all their own. Psal. iv. 6, 7.

II. The answer of the reapers to this kind salutation: they said, "The Lord bless thee."

1. Observe, when great men are also good men, and generous as well as just, they are not only entitled to, but generally receive, *the blesing of those about them.* It is desirable to see such men prosper, for when they are blessed they become a blessing. Prov. xi 10. The reapers employed by Boaz did not envy their master's wealth, but wished him to encrease more and more. 3 John 2.

2. We see in this instance that *nothing is lost by kindness.* The good wishes of Boaz were returned with the utmost cordiality, and with the same expression of pious sincerity; love begets love in return. Let a man be mindful of nobody but himself, and nobody will be mindful of him. What a man soweth, that shall he also reap, even in this life.

3. The *blessing desired by the the reapers* was equally appropriate with that which Boaz wished them to enjoy. His salutation was, The Lord be with you; and theirs, The Lord bless thee. They returned him as good as he sent, and wished him all prosperity, especially that the blessing of the Lord might attend all that he possessed. To enjoy the good will of him that dwelt in the bush, was to have Joseph's portion, and the blessing that Jabez so ardently desired. To have the divine blessing with what we possess, whether it be little or much, is to have a portion unmixed with worldly sorrow. Prov. x. 22.

(1) Let the joyful season of harvest encourage us to labour much for God, knowing that he who soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. Gal. vi. 8, 9.

(2) Let the prospect of the final harvest, gladden the hearts of such as love God, and labour in his cause. Those who now sow in tears, shall hereafter reap in joy. Psal. cxxvi. 5, 6.

VISION OF THE HOLY WATERS.

Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house; and behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward; for the fore front of the house stood toward the east, and the waters came down from under, from the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar.—Ezekiel xlvii. 1.

Great obscurity attends many parts of this book, which is chiefly delivered in figurative language; but the words of the text are not so diffi-

cult to interpret. The city and temple which the prophet saw in vision, are doubtless both figurative, and refer to times yet to come. There is also a great resemblance between this part of Ezekiel's prophecy, and the vision which John saw in the Revelation; and by comparing it with that, we may be better able to understand it. The vision of John is evidently described in language borrowed from Ezekiel.

(1) Ezekiel speaks of a man with a measuring reed, taking the dimensions of the temple and the city, xl. 3: John also gives a similar description. Rev. xxi. 5.

(2) The prophet beheld a city with gates towards the four winds of heaven; and that which the apostle saw was foursquare, and called the new Jerusalem. Rev. xxi. 16.

(3) In Ezekiel's city there is a pure river of living water, flowing in every direction; and it is the same in the vision of John. Rev. xxii. 1.

(4) This river is described in the text as issuing from the temple near the altar; and the waters which John saw, proceeded from the throne of God and the Lamb.

(5) Here were trees growing on the banks of the river, fit for food and medicine, ver. 7, 12: and so there are in the vision of John. Rev. xxii. 2.

It seems however that these two visions do not refer to the same period. It is the same city beheld by both the holy prophets, but in the vision of John it appears in a more advanced state, for there was no temple therein. Rev. xxi. 22. John's vision is descriptive of the church in its ultimate and glorified state, but Ezekiel's is descriptive of the church in the latter day; and the flowing of the waters denotes the progress of the gospel in the earth.

I. Consider the text as descriptive of the nature and salutary effects of the gospel.

1. The gospel of the grace of God is with great propriety *compared to waters*, the waters of a river; and the church to a city that is watered by a river. Psal. xlvi. 4. This river is called the water of life, a fountain issuing from the house of the Lord, and from the holy city, to denote its reviving and fructifying nature. Joel iii. 18. Zech. xiv. 8. The apostles speak of it as a stream that was flowing, and pray that it may have free course to be glorified. Our Lord describes it as a well of water, springing up to eternal life. This life-diffusing stream has long since refreshed our desert, and still revives us, till at last it shall issue in and bear us to the ocean of eternity.

2. The waters *originated in the temple*, near the altar, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. Rev. xxii. 1. The temple was the throne of God, where he sat upon the mercy-seat, to commune with the people of Israel. God in connection with the Mediator becomes the source of all our mercies, and from the altar flows our pardon and our peace. The throne of God and the Lamb is the origin of all our bliss, in this world and that which is to come. Rev. vii. 17.

3. *The progress* of these holy waters is represented as *gradual;* the beginning is small, but the latter end is great. Such also has been

the progress of the gospel in the world, and in the mind of individual believers. During the first ages of the church, the waters were only to the ancles; in the prophetic age to the knees, and to the loins; but in the gospel day it becomes a river to swim in, a river that cannot be passed over, ver. 3—5. The same also is the progress of truth in the hearts of individuals; the farther we go the more it improves upon us, and it is good to go along with the stream. Those who understand the least of gospel truth obtain life by it, and those who imbibe more of it have life more abundantly; but none can fully comprehend it, for it is a river that cannot be passed over.

4. *The blessed effects of these waters* are such, that so far as they have reached, they have filled the world with life and fruitfulness; and so far as the gospel has had free course, it has been glorified. This is represented by Ezekiel under two images——(1) By waters running into "the dead sea," healing it, and giving life to the multitude of its inhabitants, ver. 9. A lively emblem this of the moral state of the world and its elements, and of the healing efficacy of the gospel, wherever it rolls its living flood.——(2) It is compared to the waters of a river, overflowing its banks, and spreading life and verdure all around. Believers are like trees planted by its side, bearing all manner of fruit both for food and medicine. The gospel, wherever it diffuses its salutary influence, brings men to love God and one another, and this is enough for the healing of the nations. If its effects were universal, those evils which afflict the earth will be known no more. Isai. xi. 6—9.

5. There are *some parts of the earth which remain barren* after all, and are like marshy ground which will not be healed, ver. 11. Alas, how many parts of our own country are like Bethsaida and Chorazin; and how many individuals in our families and congregations that are still dead in trespasses and sins, while the living waters are flowing all around them!

II. Consider the text as a prophecy of the progress of the gospel in the latter day.

1. The spread of the gospel *is to originate in the church of God*, even as "the waters issued out from under the threshold of the sanctuary." We are not to expect this desirable event without the use of means, nor by any other means than those we already possess. It is God's usual way to bless his people, in order that they may become a blessing. It was thus with Abraham, thus with the apostles, and with the reformers in our own country. If God be merciful unto us, and cause his face to shine upon us, his way will be known upon earth, and his saving health upon all nations. Psal. lxvii. 1, 2.

2. The work will be begun and carried on, through the medium of *the doctrine of the cross*. The waters that came down from the house of the Lord, flowed from "the side of the altar," or from the throne of God and of the Lamb. The Lord will own nothing else for the conversion of sinners, or the building up of his church; and when the doctrine of Christ crucified shall revive and prevail, and fill the lips of ministers and of missionaries, that will be the signal for the conquest of the nations. Psal. cx. 2, 3.

3. This great work will *arise from small beginnings*, and go on to increase, until the whole earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. The waters at first were only a little stream, which "issued out from under the threshold of the sanctuary." Afterwards it became a mighty river, not only so deep as not to be passed over, but so broad as to extend "from En-gedi even unto En-eglaim," ver. 10.

4. The prophecy bears *a peculiarly favourable aspect towards the nations of the east.* The forefront of the house stood towards "the east," the waters issue from under the threshold of the house "eastward," and go out towards "the east country," ver. 1, 8. The gospel came from the east, and thence it is destined to return. Yet it is not to be confined to that part of the world, for there appears to be two rivers, ver. 9; one flowing eastward, and the other westward, going down into the desert, and entering the Mediterranean, in order to heal and to fructify the nations of Europe. Zech. xiv. 8.

THE GOSPEL A REVELATION FROM GOD.

We are of God: he that knoweth God, heareth us: he that is not of God, heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.—1 John iv. 6.

Inspired men brought with them such proofs of their inspiration, that they had a right to use such language as this, though it would not become the lips of ordinary teachers. At the same time the authoritative style of the apostle is not to be considered as mere assertion, the text itself carries sufficient evidence of the divine authority of the Scriptures. It amounts in effect to this, That the gospel is of God, its friends are the friends of God, and its enemies are God's enemies; and this is the criterion by which we may judge of true and false religion.

I. Endeavour to justify the appostle's assertion, that the gospel is of God, and its friends are the friends of God.

All religions profess to come from God, but there are some criterions by which they are to be tried; and in the same way we may judge of the credibility of the gospel testimony.

1. That which is of God *will side with him against an apostate world.* This is the character of the gospel, and of that alone. All false systems of religion, if they do not justify, they palliate the sinner's conduct, and lessen the demerit of sin. The points at issue are in effect, whether God shall maintain his throne, whether his will or the sinner's shall be obeyed; whether God's wisdom shall be submitted to, or the wisdom of man be substituted in its stead; and whether his way of salvation shall be embraced, or a system of self-righteousness preferred before it. On each of these points the gospel is decidedly

with God; it lays the sinner low, abases all his pride, excludes every self-righteous hope, and gives to grace alone the glory of his salvation. This is what no other system of religion does: we therefore are of God, and he that knoweth God heareth us.

2. That which is of God will *correspond with the nature and perfections of God*, and christianity is the only system that does this. No other scheme of religion is in harmony with the attributes of wisdom, righteousness, faithfulness, and goodness. None of them can answer that important enquiry, 'How can man be just with God?' 'Wherewith shall we come and appear before God?' But in the gospel, mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other. It gives glory to God in the highest, while it proclaims peace on earth, and good-will towards men. The gospel is full of God, of his wisdom, justice, and goodness. God is love, the gospel is full of love, the gospel therefore is of God.

3. That which is of God *will also lead to God*, as its centre and origin. The gospel does this, and nothing but the gospel; no other religion undertakes to renew the heart, and to bring sinners back to God. The attempts of heathen philosophy and of mere moralists to reform mankind, have never gone to the root of the disease; and those who inculcate these principles, never practise them. But the holy tendency of the gospel may be seen in its effects—

(1) Believers themselves are *conscious* of its influence. By comparing themselves with what they once were, they perceive a great difference; they have those joys and fears, those principles and affections, which show the effect that the gospel has had upon their hearts, and they have the witness in themselves, that it is of God. 1 John v. 10.

(2) Its effects also are *visible* in others about them. It is easy to perceive who are the upright, the serious, the godly amongst us: and are they not those who believe the gospel, and live under its influence? What other system has ever produced such a moral transformation, or turned men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God?

(3) These effects may be seen by comparing the characters of those who have *believed the gospel*, with those who have *rejected it*. Where shall we find in the unbelieving world such eminent men as have appeared among the professing people of God? Where such characters as among the patriarchs, the prophets and apostles; among many who have lived since their day, and of whom the world was not worthy?

(4) By comparing those parts of the world where *the gospel has prevailed*, with others that have been without it. Much has been said of heathen virtue, but it is little more than pretence; nothing like real goodness appears in places where the gospel has never come, but all have been given up to the most abominable practices. Rom. i. 28. The gospel operates not only upon those who cordially receive it, but even upon such as come in any measure within its influence. In those nations where christianity is professed, there is a much greater degree of public virtue, and genuine morality, than in others; many vices are restrained amongst us, which are committed without shame in heathen countries. Thus christians are the salt of the earth, the conservators

of public morals, and of the public weal; and the gospel which produces such saving and salutary effects, is and must be of God.

II. The doctrine of the text furnishes us with a criterion by which to judge of true and false religion. "Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error."

1. The religion of *heathenism is not of God*, for it has none of the properties already enumerated; it is not decidedly for God, it is not in harmony with his attributes, does not lead to God, and produces none of the fruits of righteousness.

2. The religion of *modern Judaism is not of God*, for it rejects the gospel and the Saviour. The Jews indeed have boasted of being the children of Abraham; but if God were their Father, they would love Christ. John viii. 42.

3. Neither is true religion to be found amongst *modern deists*. They also talk of reverence for God, and pretend to worship him; but "he that knoweth God, heareth us." A rejection of the gospel is a rejection of divine authority, and such men neither love God nor call upon his name, but live in sin, and walk according to the course of this world.

4. True religion is not to be found amongst *every description of professing christians*. The system which prevails amongst nominal christians, possesses none of the characteristics of truth; it does no honour to the character or government of God, makes no provision for the righteous exercise of mercy, and has no tendency to holiness. It is altogether another gospel, and not the gospel of Christ.

5. By the same rule also we may judge of *our own religion*, and see whether it be of God. If it be, it will be attended with the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit, will endear to us the Saviour, lead to holiness, and lead to God. All that relates to the glory of Christ, and the advancement of his kingdom in the world, will be deeply interesting to us, and we shall feel ourselves identified with his cause and people.

INTERESTING NATURE OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

Bless ye God in the congregations, even the Lord, from the fountain of Israel. There is little Benjamin with their ruler, the princes of Judah and their council, the princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali.—Psalm lxviii.—26, 27.

One of the first acts of David's reign, and one which rendered its commencement so auspicious, was the restoring the worship of God, which had been grossly neglected in the reign of Saul. In this great undertaking he had the happiness to see all the tribes cordially uniting; and now from the fulness of his heart he offers his congratulations, with devout acknowledgments of the divine goodness.

I. Attend to a few general remarks upon the text.

1. *Their work was to bless the Lord.* All his works praise him, and show forth his eternal power and Godhead; but it is peculiar to his saints to bless him. They are a royal priesthood, whose office it is to collect the offerings of the whole creation, and present them before the Lord. Blessing him is also an expression of the heart, and includes in it the exercise of love.

2. In this delightful work *all the tribes were employed*, from the first to the last of Jacob's sons, "from the fountain of Israel" to the remotest streams, from the highest to the lowest among them, the princes, the rulers, and their councils. Oh how delightful to see them all in harmony in this blessed work, and all hearts united in the worship of God. There had been many divisions and dissensions among them at different times; but now their animosities are all forgotten; and like the early christians, they are of one heart, and of one soul.

3. *Each tribe is mentioned apart*, for though the names of four only are given, the rest are included; and probably these are named as forming the principal divisions of the Iraelitish camp, as they ascended with the ark to mount Zion. The presence also of these four tribes, rendered this religious and military spectacle particularly interesting.

"There is little Benjamin with their ruler." The tribe of Benjamin belong to the house of Saul, and had formerly been devoted to his interest; but as soon as David was annointed king, they made a tender of their allegiance. 1 Chron. xii. 29. Benjamin was now a "little" tribe, since the affair of Gibeah, when a few only escaped the sword of the men of Israel, and took refuge in the rock of Rimmon. Judges xx. 47. After such a calamity it was peculiarly interesting to see the little tribe of Benjamin present on this occasion, with their ruler at their head.

"The princes of Judah" are next. This tribe was the house of David, and was the first to go up against Benjamin. Judges xx. 18. But now they are seen together, coming up with the ark to mount Zion, and vieing with each other in their zeal for the honour of God. Judah also was the most honourable of all the tribes, bearing the sceptre of royalty, and having the promise of the Messiah. Gen. xlix. 10. Heb. vii. 14.

Here also are "Zebulun and Napthali." These tribes inhabited the extremities of the holy land, on the other side Jordan, Gallilee of the gentiles, and bordering upon the kingdom of Syria. They had the least advantage of all the tribes, theirs was the land of darkness and of the shadow of death: yet their zeal on this occasion was not inferior to that of any of their brethren. It was not surprising to see Benjamin and Judah there, with their religious advantages and proximity to the holy city; but Zebulun and Naphtali had to travel about two hundred miles; and what is more they had a larger company than any of the rest. Zebulun on this occasion brought up fifty thousand, and Naphtali forty seven thousand; and they were 'not of double heart.' 1 Chron. xii. 33, 34.

II. Apply the subject to ourselves.

1. We learn that acceptable worship is *the effusion of a grateful*

heart. "Bless ye God in the congregations." The house of God is not only to be a house of prayer, but of praise; and here it is we are to exalt his name together. We are furnished with constant occasion to bless God all the days of our life, as we are every moment receiving unnumbered mercies from his hand; but there are special claims upon our gratitude when delivered out of great distress, or indulged with peculiar expressions of the divine favour. Particularly when the cause of God is revived and prospered amongst us, and the Lord is entering his sanctuary, with the ark of his strength. Psal. cxxxii. 8, 9.

2. From the example of all the tribes we learn, that each individual should be concerned *to fill up his place in the house of God*, and that we should on no account forget the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is. It is too common for persons to absent themselves from public worship on trivial occasions; sometimes personal inconvenience, at other times private disagreements or misunderstandings furnish an excuse; but these things ought not so to be. The absence of individuals from the house of God, not only affords an injurious example, but tends greatly to discourage those who labour in the word and doctrine. On the contrary, how sweet is the example in the text: "There is little Benjamin with their ruler, the princes of Judah and their council, the princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali."

3. We must be content to *sustain some inconvenience*, if we wish to enjoy the privileges of the gospel. Some are like Benjamin and Judah, who live near the doors of the sanctuary, and know nothing of the inconvenience of travelling to a distance; but in whatever situation Providence has placed us, it will delight us to go up with the multitude to keep holy day, if we truly love the name of the Lord. Psal xlii. 4. Zebulun and Naphtali discovered greater zeal than the rest of the tribes, and brought with them a larger company to Jerusalem; and thus it is often seen, that persons living at a distance from the place of worship, enjoy the privileges of the Sabbath more than those who are better situated, and are even earlier and more regular in their attendance.

4. We see that much of *the beauty of public worship* consists in the harmony and variety of the worshippers. What an interesting spectacle must have presented itself in the many thousands, and even hundreds of thousands, who were gathered together at Jerusalem, all praising and blessing God, as the ark ascended into its rest; persons from all quarters of the land, of every rank and condition in life, princes and rulers, with their subjects.

5. Praising and blessing God will be *the employment of heaven*. The more we engage in it now, the more we shall resemble the blessed above; the more also shall we be meetened for their society, and to join in the song of Moses and the Lamb. There will also be a multitude which no man can number, out of every kindred and tongue, and people and nation.

LOVE TO CHRIST INFERRED FROM NEGATIVE PRINCIPLES.

He that is not against us is on our part.—Mark ix. 40.

It has justly been observed, that religion does not consist in mere negatives; and our Lord once said, 'He that is not with me is against me.' All this is true, yet it seems from the text that if true religion does not consist in mere negatives, it may nevertheless be inferred from what is negative; or that where there is no enmity, there is real friendship for Christ. The text supposes indeed that there can be no neutrality, but that all men are either the enemies or the friends of Christ.

1. Enquire what is included in the absence of enmity towards Christ, or what it is, "not to be against him."

The Scriptures teach us that the carnal mind is enmity against God, though few men think themselves to be in such a state. This disposition does not show itself so immediately in an aversion from the natural perfections of God, much less when considered as a benefactor, as in a direct opposition to his moral character and government. The original apostasy arose from this aversion, which is still apparent in all the sons of men.

The same may be said of enmity to Christ; it does not operate against him as a Saviour, or as the benefactor of mankind; but against the nature of his salvation, and the humbling principles of his gospel. Hence it is that unbelievers in general are not aware of the existence of this enmity, and would be unwilling to be considered as directly hostile. Nevertheless it manifests itself in various ways—

1. By a dislike to *draw near to God* in the exercise of devotion. Some indeed deride the notion altogether, others think there is no need for it, and others who conform themselves to the decencies of public or family worship, engage in it only as a task, from which they would wish to be excused. If it be otherwise with us, and all this enmity has been subdued, we are not against Christ, but on his part.

2. Enmity appears in a dislike to *think and speak about God* and the Redeemer. Hence it is the habitual aim of carnal men to exclude God from their thoughts, by imputing every thing to second causes, and disregarding the operations of his hand. In adversity or prosperity, his word has no abiding place in them. There is an equal dislike to salvation from sin, and salvation by grace, and to that self-denial which is made the condition of discipleship. But if all these aversions are removed, and the heart has relinquished its opposition, though by insensible degrees, we are not against Christ, but on his part. Matt. xi. 6.

3. Enmity to Christ shows itself in a *dislike of his followers*, and those who bear his image. The Jews pretended to love God while they hated the Redeemer, and many profess to believe in Christ while they hate his people; but it is in this that the enmity of the heart is manifest.

Nominal christians can bear with a nominal christianity, but living goodness they cannot endure. How then is it with us in this respect? Are we against Christ, or do we love those that love him?

II. Notice a few of those characters, who though they are not against Christ, yet labouring under various doubts and disadvantages, are hardly considered by themselves or others as being on Christ's side, while in reality they are so.

1. There are some who from situation, connection, or other unavoidable causes, are *kept from associating with the godly;* yet they drink into the spirit of the gospel, and are concerned to honour it. Some humble christians live in obscurity, and are so unfavourably situated, that they are scarcely known. Others from natural reserve, and the want of clearer views, have scarcely ventured to express themselves decidedly in favour of the gospel. In many such cases we may be ready to say as the disciples did of the man who did not follow with them; and yet Jesus may say of them as in the text, He that is not against me is on our part. They also may say as those of old, Though Abraham be ignorant of us, yet doubtless thou art our Father. Isai. lxiii. 16.

2. There are others who though they frequent the assemblies of the saints, *have but little to say on behalf of Christ*, either from weakness or natural timidity, and so are unnoticed and unknown. Yet there are some of this description, who though they cannot speak much for Christ, could even die for him. They make no display of their piety, yet they have some good thing in them towards the Lord God of Israel, and could not only give a cup of cold water to a disciple, but do any thing in their power for the sake of the Lord Jesus: ver. 41.

3. Many who are deterred from making *a public profession of religion*, from diffidence and self-suspicion, are also of this description. They fear that all is not right with them, that they need higher attainments, and a more enlarged experience of the truth, to justify their pretensions of love to Christ; yet he will own them as his friends, amidst all their weaknesses and infirmities. Matt. xxii. 20.

4. Some *by their backslidings*, from peculiar temptations, may have rendered their religion doubtful; and yet are far from being against Christ, or indifferent to his cause. Their hearts mourn in secret for their folly, and they feel that they could on no account part with the Saviour. The question put by our Lord to Peter, after his resurrection, supposes that there may be some real love to him, amidst all the clouds and darkness that surround them. John xxi. 15.

III. Attempt to justify the merciful decision of the Saviour, "that those who are not against him are on his part."

1. If the friends of Christ were to be distinguished by any thing but *the temper of their hearts towards him*, it would to some be the occasion of presumption, and to others of despair. Men are apt to value themselves on account of the party to which they are attached, as

was the case with the disciples in the present instance; and some on account of the publicity of their profession. But perhaps in this respect, many that are first shall be last, and the last first. When the Lord shall make up his jewels, he will find many of them lying in obscurity and neglect.

2. If we be but *on Christ's side*, we possess a meetness for the kingdom of heaven, and that will be sufficient. Whatever be our imperfections, they shall be forgiven us, and when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.

3. The natural enmity of our hearts to Christ is such, that wherever it exists it cannot fail to manifest itself in some way or other, either directly or indirectly. Where therefore there are no indications of this principle, it is but just to infer that it does not exist, but has given place to love, and that Christ has gained a friend.

REFLECTIONS.

(1) What inimitable tenderness marks the conduct of the Saviour. He knew how to pity the errors and weaknesses of his disciples, and how to distinguish his friends and followers under every disadvantage. He gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom; and will at last own for his, those whom we little expected.

(2) How much does it become us, from his example, to give encouragement, wherever there are the least appearances of love to him: to make that the test of true religion, rather than the existence of any other principle, and without respect to party distinctions.

GOD'S PECULIAR MERCY TO THE GENTILES.

After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up; that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.—Acts xv. 16, 17.

The judaising teachers who began so early to corrupt the gospel, were of the sect of the Pharisees; and though they professed to believe in Christ, they were for making circumcision essential to salvation, ver. 5. Peter and the rest of the apostles steadfastly opposed this error, maintaining that God had placed both Jews and gentiles on a level; that the law of circumcision was no more, and that salvation was by faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. In confirmation of this, and also of God's design to convert the gentiles, the apostle James adduces the words of the text, from Amos ix. 11, 12.

I. Endeavour to illustrate the subject by a few remarks.

1. The promise of mercy here made to sinful men is contained in a promise of *glory and honour to Christ.* "I will return and build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down." This is God's way of showing mercy, and must be our way of seeking it. The very first intimation of mercy was made to man only indirectly, and was included in the promise given to Christ, as the woman's seed. The honour intended for him, included mercy for us; but it is mercy only in this way. If therefore we seek it for ourselves or others, we must pray that the tabernacle of David may be built up, and the ruins thereof repaired.

2. The exaltation of Christ was to be signalized by *the conversion of the gentiles*, and the consequent enlargement of his mediatorial kingdom. Christ's ascension should be like a public coronation, the prison doors should be thrown open, and the captives who had long lain in mental darkness should partake of the general joy. The day of pentecost was only an earnest of what was to follow; the gentiles should afterwards find mercy, and more still in the latter day, when all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God.

3. The converted gentiles are to have *the name of Christ called upon them.* He will own them as his, and they that were not a people shall now be called the children of the living God. Rom. ix. 26. This honour should be transferred from the apostate Jews to the believing gentiles, who should henceforth in a distinguished manner bear the christian name.

4. What God has promised to his well-beloved Son, affords *peculiar encouragement to us.* Before the incarnation, the blessings of salvation were chiefly confined to the Jews; to them belonged the covenants, and the promises; but now the gentiles, from the highways and hedges, are invited to the gospel feast, and they are compelled to come in. Matt. xxii. 9, 10.

5. The encouragement is addressed to men *as a residue.* Those who live in these last ages of the world are called a "residue," a remnant that is left. The numerous heathen nations that lived and died without a knowledge of the Saviour, were like an army slain in battle, while those of later ages, to whom the gospel has been preached, are only a small remnant; just as it was with Israel, the greater part of whom died on the passage to Canaan, while those who were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness. Jer. xxxi. 2. Thus it was after the destruction of the old world; God accepted of Noah's offering, and was very gracious to the remnant that were left. In this manner he deals with the heathen nations, reserving his mercy for them to the later periods of the world, when the residue shall be encouraged to seek the Lord.

6. The *success* of this great undertaking, in sending the gospel to the gentiles, is secured by *the omnipotence of God*, "who doeth all these things." The obstacles are sufficiently numerous to defeat every human effort, and to damp the zeal of the most ardent and aspiring; but it is the Lord's work, and in his hands it can never fail. It is his to build again the tabernacle of David, and to raise up the ruins thereof; even the Lord, who doeth all these things. Isai. ix. 7.

II. Consider the encouragement arising from hence to seek the Lord, even all the gentiles upon whom his name is called.

1. We live in the times of the Messiah, *under the reign of grace and mercy*, when every one that seeketh findeth. Formerly, if any among the gentiles sought the Lord, it was like feeling after him, as men who had lost their way, and were left in the dark. Acts xvii. 27. But now under the light of the gospel the path is made plain, and our feet are guided into the way of peace, Luke i. 79. The world was lost in a labyrinth of sin and error, but God has cast up a way of return; prophets and apostles have gathered out the stones, and set up the way-mark. Hence our encouragement to seek him in the name of Jesus, who alone is the way to God.

2. We who are now alive upon the earth are *the residue of men*, a kind of surviving remnant, for whom special mercy is reserved. God has taken pity on us, and we should have pity on ourselves. Consider what havoc death has made amongst mankind, what multitudes have perished in their sins, and become a prey to Satan. We are like the six hundred Benjamites, who escaped the general destruction. Judges xx. 47. God is calling to us, and speaking words of peace, inviting us to seek his face, and promising abundantly to pardon. Isai. lv. 6, 7.

3. The residue of men in the latter day appear to be reserved by the Lord, for *a peculiar people to himself*, and on whom he will show more abundant mercy. All the grace that has been before displayed, is only like the drops before the shower, when the Lord will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground. Our encouragement therefore to seek him is increased, seeing that upon us the ends of the world are come.

4. The example of those who have sought the Lord, should *excite us to emulation*. There were children in our Lord's time, who cried hosanna to the Son of David, let this excite those who are young in years to do the same. Publicans and sinners entered into the kingdom of God, let this encourage the chief of sinners to plead for mercy; let this also provoke the sober and devout to seek the salvation of their souls, lest publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom of God before them.

IMPORTANCE OF INVIGORATED PIETY.

That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.—Ephesians iii. 16.

This is part of Paul's prayer for the church at Ephesus, and not for them only, but for the people of God in all future ages. The passage

is rich and full of meaning, and the blessing prayed for is of unspeakable importance.

I. Explain the import of the petition, or what it is to be "strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man."

Might in the "inner man" is here contrasted to that which belongs to the outward man, or mere bodily strength. Samson had much of the latter, and but little of the former. It does not consist however in *mental* energy merely, or strength of intellect. Solomon was a man of good understanding, and of a strong mind, yet he possessed but little of what the apostle prays for. It is *spiritual* might that is here intended, such as is peculiar to real christians, and communicated by the spirit of God. Every thing spiritual or holy is ascribed to his spiritual influence and he it is that worketh all our works in us.

Spiritual might in general signifies a vigorous state of soul; it is to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might; to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. It is to have all the affections in lively exercise, and to enjoy spiritual prosperity.

1. If we are strengthened with might in the inner man, it will appear *in the manner in which we discharge religious duties.* The same attention may in general be paid to them; but there will be a great difference in the manner of performing them. If strengthened with might, it will be our meat and drink to do the will of God; but if otherwise, it will be a dull and heavy task. If wanting in spiritual energy, we shall feel most alive in public duties, which come under the notice of others; but if our souls prosper, we shall feel most at home in secret duties, and those which are most spiritual. There may be various motives to quicken us in public exercises which can have no influence on those of a private nature; and it is in these that spiritual might is most evident. He whose religion is on the decline, discharges every duty by halves, with coldness and indifference; but if possessed of spiritual energy, we shall be like Caleb and Joshua, who 'followed the Lord fully.' This difference may be seen in David and Solomon, 1 Kings xi. 3: in Manasseh and Josiah, 2 Kings xxiii. 25.

2. It will appear *in the manner in which we resist temptation.* All men are exposed to temptation, and it is common to all good men to resist it; but there is a great difference in the manner of doing it. If our souls are in a weak and declining state, we shall easily be overcome, or induced to yield; at best the resistance will be but feeble, scarcely amounting to a decided victory. But if strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, the temptation will be made to flee, without a parley or a truce. With Jesus we shall say, Thus it is written: and with Joseph, How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God.

3. It will be seen *in the manner in which we bear affliction.* If strengthened with spiritual might, we shall bear all our troubles with patience and long-suffering. Col. i. 11. Thus it was with the apostles and primitive christians, who endured a great fight of afflictions, and rejoiced even in tribulation, counting it all joy to meet with divers temptations and trials. But if in a declining state we shall sink under every

burden, and faint when we are rebuked of him, or else despise the chastening of the Lord. Heb. xii. 5. Prov. xxiv. 10.

4. *The sense we have of our own weakness*, will show in what degree we are strengthened from above. When I am weak, says the apostle, then am I strong. This is one of the mysteries of true religion, but every experimental christian understands it. Peter was never weaker than when confident of his own strength, nor Paul stronger than when he felt himself to be nothing; for then it was that the power of Christ rested upon him. 2 Cor. xii. 9. Therefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall. A sense of weakness leads to prayer, and this is calling in aid from above. It also shows the need of watchfulness, and this is a preservative from evil.

II. Consider the desirableness of the blessing prayed for.

Paul would not have been so earnest and importunate for any inferior blessing. Or if to be converted, and brought into a state of salvation, were all that is necessary or desirable, he would have prayed for this only; but he was solicitous that great grace might rest upon them all.

1. By our being thus strengthened, *God is more especially glorified*, If we have believed through grace, it is a great mercy; but if strong in faith, we shall give glory to God. He taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy; but more still if we abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the strong and vigorous christian that does honour to the gospel.

2. The Lord generally *grants success* to a vigorous and well-directed *zeal in his cause*, and will not suffer our labour to be in vain. It was thus that Hezekiah prospered, for he did every thing with all his heart. 2 Chron. xxxi. 21. This is of great importance especially in the ministry of the word; for it is not intellectual ability, either natural or acquired, but spiritual might, that is the grand prerequisite and the surer sign of success. In aid of this great undertaking nothing is a more powerful auxiliary than the exhibition of a lively and vigorous piety among the followers of Christ, who by this means attest the reality and interesting nature of the gospel. 2 Cor. iii. 2.

3. Being strengthened with might in the inner man, will also give us a capacity for *understanding the gospel*, ver. 17—19. A saving and extensive acquaintance with divine truth is best promoted by a spiritual and humble frame of heart, for spiritual things are spiritually discerned. 1 Cor. ii. 14. It is this state of mind that enables us to see the moral beauty and excellence of the word of God, and to be delighted with its richness.

4. Being strong in the Lord will *render us useful in the world*, and enable us to carry a savour of religion about us. It was thus with primitive believers, who were seen to bear the image of the Saviour. Acts iv. 13. A christian who declines in spirituality, instead of growing stronger and stronger, can do but little good in the world; for if the salt has lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted. Matt. v. 13.

Finally: As the blessing implored is unspeakably desirable, so we have every encouragement to seek it. God is rich in mercy, and he gives according to his riches. Phil. iv. 19.

ATTENTION DEMANDED BY THE GOSPEL.

To day if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness.—Psalm xcv. 7, 8.

The past conduct of Israel and their end, are here adduced as a warning to those in David's time, who were the professed worshippers of the true God, ver. 7. Paul also addresses the same warning to professors in his day, and sets before them the same example of unbelief. Heb. iii. 7, 8. May not we likewise do the same, and consider the warning as addressed to every worshipping assembly? The congregation of Israel were not all true believers, nor were the Hebrew christians whom Paul addressed; yet they professed to be the sheep of God's pasture. You also dwell where the shepherd dwells, and where his voice is heard; to you therefore is the language of the text addressed.

I. Explain the exhortation: "To day if ye will hear his voice"—

The gospel is here supposed to be *the voice of God.* Here it is that he proclaims his glory, the excellence and goodness of his holy law, the evil and demerit of sin. At the same time this voice from heaven proclaims to us a way of escape, and warns us to flee from the wrath to come. It calls us to repent, and believe in Jesus, as the only name given under heaven whereby we must be saved, warning us also that there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin. Its language to the thoughtless and unconcerned, is like that addressed to Jonah: And now what meanest thou? Arise and call upon thy God. To those who are living at a distance from God it says, Seek ye the Lord while he may be found. To all who are destitute of true wisdom it calls, Oh ye simple, when will ye be wise? And to those who listen with tenderness it gives the kind assurance, Him that cometh I will in no wise cast out.

Again: As the gospel is the voice of God, so *you are required to hearken to it.* You are left indeed to your choice, whether you will hear it or not. Life and death are set before you: choose ye this day whom ye will serve. But whether you will hear or whether you will forbear, the obligations you are under to hearken to his voice, and the consequences of refusing to do so, must be faithfully stated.

To "hear his voice" then, is not merely to attend the preaching of the gospel; it is to obey, as well as to hearken. It is so to hear that your souls may live; to hear with affection and delight, and to receive the truth in love.

If ye will hear his voice, "harden not your heart." A tender heart is like the good ground, susceptible of the word; while a hard heart, on the contrary, prevents the access of truth, and renders it ineffectual.

More particularly—

1. *Beware of an unbelieving or doubting state of mind*, respecting the truth and reality of the word of God. Some who attend the gospel have no settled conviction of its divine authenticity; they neither admit nor positively deny it, but are hesitating and halting between two opinions; and thus the heart is hardened against conviction. This was the case with many of the Hebrews, who seemed not to know whether the gospel was true or not. This is a most ruinous state of mind, for it leads on to hardness of heart, and a final rejection of the truth. Beware then of hesitating, till you find the gospel to be true; to your cost.

2. *Be careful not to evade the intentions of the gospel*, but consider it as it really is, as truly and certainly addressed to you individually, as if you were the only persons immediately interested in it. There is a great proneness to escape the convictions which the word is adapted to produce, by transferring it to others, instead of applying it to ourselves; and by this means the heart is insensibly hardened, till it acquires an unyielding obduracy. It is the evident intention of God's word, when it commands, or threatens, or invites, that you should consider it as directly spoken to *you;* and if not thus regarded, it is rendered of none effect. In this way the Israelites provoked God, speaking by his servant Moses; and for this they perished in the wilderness.

3. *Tremble at the thought of standing it out against God*, and setting at nought his blessed gospel. Some have even presumed to do this, and would have none of his counsel. Pharaoh refused to hearken; and though sometimes he appeared to be alarmed, yet his fears went off again, till at length his heart was hardened to his destruction. Dread a state of habitual indifference and neglect, lest you should be given up of God for ever.

4. *Take heed of making light of present privileges and opportunities.* This was the ruin of the people of Israel; they made light of all the wonders God had wrought, in Egypt and in the wilderness; and though he fed them with manna from heaven, their souls loathed the light food; till at last he swore in his wrath, that they should not enter into his rest. Your privileges however are much greater than theirs; you live under the reign of grace, have better promises, and brighter hopes than they. You have also greater advantages than those of most other nations; you have the Scriptures, which others have not; a preached gospel, which others have not. Beware of making light of all these inestimable privileges. The salvation set before you is a great one, and attended with an accumulation of evidence; beware of neglecting it, and of turning away from that voice which now speaks to you from heaven. Heb. ii. 3, 4. xii. 25.

II. Offer a few motives to enforce the exhortation.

1. Remember you *now have opportunities of hearing God's voice*, sounding in his word; and whatever be the use that any one may make

of it, the privilege itself is inestimable. The opportunities now so richly enjoyed may not be long continued: if therefore ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. 2 Cor. vi. 2.

2. *God demands speedy attention*, and a speedy answer. It is "to day" you are required to consider, and to obey his voice. Perhaps you may not have another day for it; and your silence or indifference will be considered as a rejection of the divine counsel. To day is the only time you can call your own; yesterday is past for ever, to-morrow may never come. Prov. xxvi. 1.

3. If you should *harden your heart*, consider the consequences. Who hath hardened himself against God and prospered? Job ix. 4. Pharaoh is left as a warning to all incorrigible sinners.

4. If you hearken not to the voice of God, *you will never enter into his rest.* Recollect the fate of the Israelites, who perished through unbelief. Heb. iii. 18, 19. iv. 1.

5. Remember it is *not even now too late*, though you have never attended to his voice before. Even "to day" he waiteth to be gracious, and will pour out of his Spirit upon you, if you turn at his reproof. Prov. i. 23.

VISIBLE EFFECTS OF THE GRACE OF GOD.

And they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch: who when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.—Acts xi. 22, 23.

In reading the Acts of the apostles it is interesting to observe the progress of the gospel, and how even persecution itself is made subservient to that design, ver. 19. How pleasant also to see the men of Cyprus and Cyrene preaching Christ to the gentiles, whom the Jewish converts had overlooked, and preaching too with great success, ver. 21. Tidings of this good work having reached the church at Jerusalem, they sent forth Barnabas to superintend and to comfort those who had believed.

Three things may be noticed in the conduct of Barnabas, on his arrival at the city of Antioch—What he saw—what he felt—and what he did.

I. Observe what Barnabas saw: "the grace of God."

1. In some sense *the grace of God is invisible*, and not to be seen. It is a secret influence upon the mind, the influence of the Holy Spirit. The world sees it not, and it knows us not. It creates a bitterness which the heart only knows, and a joy that the stranger intermeddles not with. In some sense, the grace of God is hidden

from the party possessing it: he feels the effects, yet thinks and knows but little about the cause. He is drawn, but does not see the hand that draws him. Hence the awakened sinner wonders to find the bible a new book, and thinks any one must see what he sees. But though the grace of God is itself invisible, its effects are sufficiently manifest. It may often be seen in the countenance, mien, and aspect of the party, always in the spirit and conduct.

2. There are times when the grace of God is *especially to be seen amongst a people*, more than at other seasons. If Barnabas had visited Ephesus or Laodicea at a later period, he would have seen but little of the grace of God. He that walks among the seven golden candlesticks, saw but little of the power of religion in these churches. The same may be said of many that are called christian congregations. In some of them we behold nothing but formality, a valley of dry bones, exceeding dry. But there are times when the grace of God may evidently be seen amongst a people, when there is a shaking among the dry bones, and they are clothed with flesh and sinews.

3. There also are *individuals*, in whom we see *much more* of the grace of God than in others. There are some who are considered as christians, and perhaps they may be so, yet very little of the grace of God can be seen in them, but much carnality and worldly mindedness. Others of whom we know but little, are thought to be good people; but if they be, their christianty is not very apparent. Some there are however, in whom it may readily be discovered; not by their forwardness to talk, but by much better symptoms than this.

(1) In *some* a great change of *character and conduct* is visible, as in Saul the persecutor, Zaccheus the publican, and many others. They were once afar off, but are now made nigh; once unrighteous and unholy, but are now sanctified, and justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Cor. vi. 10,11.

(2) There are others of a more reputable character, in whom the change is *less obvious* or intrusive, yet it may clearly be seen. There is something in their manner of speaking that betrays them, something in the manner of hearing the word that bespeaks an altered state of mind. They formerly were careless, or if not, they were unimpressed; but now that the heart of stone is taken away, the truth sinks deep into their souls. In their behaviour too, the grace of God is visible. They were civil, and perhaps polite before; but now, tender and affectionate, their words are full of meaning, the language of the heart. The interest they feel in the gospel of Christ, in its success, and the conversion of souls; the love they manifest towards the brethren, their tenderness of conscience, zeal, patience under afflictions and reproaches, all give evidence of the grace of God that is in them.

II. What Barnabas felt: "he was glad."

It would fill him with joy to see any brought to the knowledge of the truth, but to see the gentiles embracing the Saviour was quite a new scene. He had long dwelt among them, though himself a Jew, but had witnessed nothing of the kind before.

What can afford greater joy to a faithful minister, than to see the grace of God among his people, especially in those of the rising generation. I have no greater joy, said an apostle, than to hear that my children walk in truth. 3 John 4. To see it also in the aged, bringing forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and encircling them with a crown of glory, is of itself a rich reward. Even the occasional visit of such a man as Barnabas, to a spiritual, zealous and affectionate people, is sufficient to gladden his heart.

It is some pleasure to see gifts rising up in the church, promising future usefulness, and to behold multitudes attend the word; but to witness the effects of divine grace on their hearts and lives, is far more interesting. This it is that forms a bond of union, and gives an earnest of future glory. Where we see the grace of God, we also see the heirs of immortality and eternal life.

III. What he did: "he exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord."

Having been brought to the knowledge of the truth, our immédiate concern is to persevere in a decided attachment to the Saviour, and to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. Grace does not supersede great exertions, diligence, and watchfulness; those only who endure to the end shall be saved.

No sooner does a sinner embrace the gospel, than there are many things which tend to draw him aside from it. Our forefathers met with great persecution, which required them with purpose of heart to cleave unto the Lord. We are meeting with worldly objects to draw off our attention, and alienate our hearts from God. Like the Hebrews and Galatians, some are shaken with false doctrine, and drawn aside from the simplicity of the gospel. There is great need therefore for the exhortation, which Barnabas addressed to those who had received the grace of God in truth. In all our trials it becomes us to exhort one another daily, and to suffer the word of exhortation; to attend constantly upon the means of grace, and to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure. 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

SALUTARY INFLUENCE OF THE SCRIPTURES.

Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.—Psalm xvii. 4.

It was foretold from the beginning that there should be enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, and so it has been all along to this day. Much of this was seen in the early part of David's life: not only did Saul hate him, but there was a party ever

ready to accuse him of mischievous designs. Against these David makes his appeal, and desires that his sentence might come forth from the divine presence, ver. 1—3. The text is also a part of this appeal, attesting the circumspection and uprightness of his conduct.

I. The object of David's meditation was "the works of men," and "the paths of the destroyer."

He observed the ways of the world, and the courses which wicked men pursued, in order to learn instruction from it. Let us do the same, and we shall see what the works of men will lead to.

1. The paths that some walk in are *destructive to the wellbeing of society.* Such are the paths of those who live in open and flagrant sins; the way of drunkards and profane persons, of liars, persecutors and oppressors. Their paths are an inroad upon the peace and order of society, and lead directly to misery and destruction. Yet in these paths multitudes are walking, and draw others after them, till they fall together into the pit of perdition.

2. The paths of others are *destructive to their temporal interests.* They are ruinous to their peace, their comfort, their health, and even life itself. The same sins by which they ruin others, they also ruin themselves. Who hath woe, who hath sorrow, who hath contentions, who hath babbling, who hath wounds without cause? They that tarry long at the wine, they that go to seek mixed wine. Prov. iii. 29, 30. Destruction and misery are in the way of the wicked, and the way of peace have they not known; while godliness has the promise of this life, as well as of that which is to come.

3. All the paths of sin are *destructive to the soul, and will lead to final ruin.* Every sinner is self-destroyed. He is already exposed to the wrath of God as the lawgiver; and by a perseverance in sin, and a rejection of the gospel, he is ruined not only in desert, but also in fact. It is not merely the profligate that is in danger of destruction, though that is most obvious; the path of the self-righteous leads to the same issue, for it turns aside from the only way of salvation. If there be any evil way in us, it will prevent our walking in the way that is everlasting.

II. The use which David made of his observations on the ways and works of men: it was to "keep himself from the paths of the destroyer."

He made the same use of these things as a pilot would of rocks and shoals, in his passage through the ocean; he observed them in order to avoid them. Some consider the works of men only to expose and censure them, and others only to revenge and punish; but David to learn wisdom, and to guide his way.

The proper use then to be made of the wickedness we see in the world is to keep ourselves from it, or to notice it only for the purpose of avoiding it; this will be to extract good out of evil, and sweetness out of the strong. He that taks a proper view of the depravity of mankind, will

perceive in others its odiousness and its issue. In numerous instances we see to what it brings men even in this world; to infamy, disease, and death; often to a miserable and ignominious death.

III. The means by which David was preserved from the evils of the world, namely, "by the word of thy lips."

We may see what effect the word of God has upon individuals, and upon society at large, by comparing the state of public morals as existing with or without a divine revelation.

See, for example, what paganism has produced in all its forms, where the Scriptures are unknown. See what Mahomedanism and papal superstition have produced, where the Scriptures have been withheld, and they have taught for doctrine the commandments of men. See what is the state of those families and individuals, where the word of God is disregarded. On the other hand, witness its effects wherever it is read and understood, and cordially embraced. What multitudes have been reclaimed from the paths of the destroyer, both in christian and in heathen countries, by the free circulation of the Scriptures. In numberless instances the word of God has been quick and powerful to convince of sin, and equally explicit in directing to the only remedy. By taking it as a light unto our feet, and a lamp unto our paths, multitudes have shunned the paths of the destroyer; have walked with God through life, and finished their course with joy.

We may now observe how it is that the word of God tends to preserve us from the paths of the destroyer—

1. By *the purity of its precepts.* These, if we love them, will keep us in the hour of temptation. It was in this way that our Lord repelled the tempter; and if we succeed, we must take the sword of the Spirit. The first sin was introduced into the world by doubting the truth of God's word, the enemy having insinuated that the offenders should not surely die; let us, therefore, take heed of the warnings which God has given us "by the word of his lips." If allured by the present evil world, or by the company of ungodly men, let us remember what is written. Prov. iv. 14, 15. Col. iii. 2. 1 John ii. 15.

2. By the *awfulness of its threatenings*, it is adapted to keep us from the way of death. If we converse much with the Scriptures, we shall stand in awe, and sin not. Our Lord denounced awful threatenings of condemnation and destruction, in order to deter us from the commission of sin, and laid his prohibitions on the indulgence of every evil thought.

3. By *the impressive examples* it has left on record, in numerous instances. In the case of Lot we see the consequences of worldly mindedness, and also of intemperance. In the case of David the effects of sensuality, and of luxurious ease. In the instance of Peter, the danger of self-confidence, and going in the way of temptation. In Jehoshaphat we see the consequence of sinful and worldly connections: he formed an alliance with Ahab, and lost his life in battle. All these are fearful examples, and written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the world are come. 1 Cor. x. 11.

4. By *its glorious doctrines*, we are also kept from the paths of sin. Nothing renders sin so supremely odious as the doctrine of the cross; in the sufferings of Christ we see it in all its native deformity, and the infinite displeasure of God against it. Every doctrine of the gospel is according to godliness, and teaches us to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present evil world; but it is by the cross of Christ that our sinful affections and lusts are to be crucified, and the body of sin destroyed. If the love of Christ does not keep us from evil, nothing will.

5. Its *precious promises* afford a powerful preservative against sin, and by them it is that we escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. 2 Pet. i. 4. Let us but keep our eye upon the promise of eternal life, and it will wean our hearts from all the vanities of time and sense. Thy word have I hid in my heart, says the Psalmist, that I might not sin against thee; and if the word of Christ dwell in us richly, sin shall not have dominion over us. This is the only sovereign antidote for the moral contagion of our nature. Gal. v. 16.

THE SPIRITUAL SEED OF ABRAHAM.

Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.—Galatians iv. 28.

It is affecting to observe how prone we are to turn aside to error, and what early attempts were made to corrupt the gospel. The Galatians, though they enjoyed the ministry of the apostles, and avowed the warmest attachment to Paul, suffered themselves to be influenced by a set of judaising teachers, who wanted to introduce circumcision as necessary to salvation. So long as it was attended to by the Jews only, and not with a view to their justification, Paul speaks of it as a thing indifferent, saying that neither 'circumcision availed any thing, nor uncircumcision.' But when it was made the ground of a sinner's acceptance with God, he regarded it as subversive of the whole gospel. He accordingly tells the Galatians that they had 'fallen from grace,' that they had introduced 'another gospel,' and that with such views 'Christ would profit them nothing.'

The leading design therefore of this epistle is to prove that we are justified by faith, and not by the works of the law. For this purpose the apostle alleges that Abraham was not justified by works, but by faith in the promised Messiah; and that all his spiritual seed were to be saved by faith only, iii. 8, 9. That the covenant made with Abraham was more ancient than the Sinai covenant, and could not be disannulled by it, iii. 17. That the same doctrine was taught even by the historical events in Abraham's family, which were allegorical in their meaning and intent. Hagar and her son answer to Jerusalem that now is, to the

Jewish church in a state of bondage under the law; and Sarah and her son to the heavenly Jerusalem, the mother of us all, iv. 24—26.

I. Briefly explain the terms in the text.

1. The word "promise" here is of a similar import with the gospel, of which Christ is the sum and substance. It is called a promise, in contradistinction to the law, which knows nothing of undeserved mercy. That which comes as the reward of our obedience is of the law; that which is of grace only, is matter of free promise.

2. Isaac is said to have been "the child of promise," and he was so in two respects He was born, not according to the ordinary course of nature, but given by the special promise of God to Abraham, and brought forth by the extraordinary power of God. Next, he had a peculiar inheritance given him, which Ishmael was not allowed to share. He had not only a portion in Canaan, but the promise that the Messiah was to spring from him, and that all true believers should be reckoned as his spiritual seed. Rom. ix. 7, 8.

II. Consider the leading design of the apostle, which is to show that all real christians become such, not by natural descent, but by the special interposition of God; or that "they are children of the promise as Isaac was."

We are not christians by *birth*, however wise or holy our ancestors may be; nor by *education*, whatever advantages of this kind we may have enjoyed. Ishmael had both these on his side, yet had no part in the promise. Believers being born of God, is as much out of the common course of nature as the birth of Isaac, but alike essential to their being heirs of the promise of eternal life.

Hence when Abraham understood the promise, he had *no hope from second causes*, but 'against hope believed in hope.' Those who are eventually born of God, were often given up in a hopeless case, after various means had been used in vain: and if means at length become effectual, it is by the mighty power of God. John i. 13. James i. 18.

Isaac was not only born by the extraordinary interposition of God, but this was *according to promise*, that at the set time Sarah should have a son. It is thus also in regard to believers; their conversion is according to the promise made to Christ Jesus before the world began. Ephes. i. 3, 4. Titus i. 2. All that are saved were promised to Christ as the reward of his sufferings, and that he might see of the travail of his soul. Isai. xlix. 6. liii. 10.

Believers were not only given in promise to Christ, but also *to the church*, and to Abraham, whose seed they are. Often did God promise to the church, when in a low state, a glorious increase from among the gentiles; and every conversion among them is the fulfilment of that promise. Jer. xvi. 19. Ephes. iii. 6. Rom. iv. 13.

III. Christians, like Isaac, are heirs of a spiritual inheritance.

1. Their inheritance is ***great:*** it contains all the blessings of the new covenant, of salvation and eternal life.

2. It is of *grace*, and not by the works of the law. All is a free gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

3. It is chiefly *future*, and only partially enjoyed in the present world. To us are given exceeding great and precious promises, and we must live by faith as the patriarchs did, who were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

DESTRUCTION OF THE LAST ENEMY.

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.—1 Corinthians xv. 26.

Mercy to man was first introduced under the form of a threatening against the serpent, and mercy to man closes its career in the same form; namely, in a threatening against one of the principal works of the same enemy, and by the same hand. Gen. iii. 15. The former was the signal for the commencement of this warfare, and the latter its termination. Christ is here considered as a king, to whom it is promised that he shall reign till his enemies are subdued; death is personified and ranked among his enemies, the last to be destroyed.

I. Observe, death is here denominated an " enemy."

It may truly be said to be such, because it is opposed to our very existence; it is the penalty due to sin, and nature revolts at its approach. It is the king of terrors, at war with man from the commencement of his being. It is a fearful consideration, that there is no way of passing to glory, but through the gates of death. We must go and leave all behind us; and if Christ do not receive us, we must fall into perdition.

Yet it may be asked, why does Christ himself reckon it as an enemy? Death is not like Satan, an enemy to God as well as man; it is a part of the punishment due to sin. Why then does Christ consider it as an enemy and threaten its destruction?

1. Because it is one of *the chief effects of sin*, and it is his object to destroy all these effects, on behalf of those who believe in him. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil; and death is one of his principal works. 1 John iii. 8.

2. Because *his love to his people* is such, that he considers their enemies as his own, though now he himself dieth no more, and death hath no more dominion over him. By his sufferings on the cross he destroyed him that had the power of death, and eventually death itself shall be swallowed up in victory.

3. Death not only sets himself against us, but *also against him*, when

in our nature; so that it is the common enemy of Christ and his people. Death obtained a temporary victory over him; it is fit therefore that he should be threatened as an enemy, and fall at last by Christ's hand.

II. Death is called "the last enemy."

He is the last to us individually, the last to the church of God collectively, and the last enemy that Christ encountered upon earth.

The intimation here is, that many will have fallen by death, before he himself is destroyed. Many other enemies of Christ will be subdued in succession, but this direful adversary will hold it out to the very last.

1. When Jesus drew his sword in this warfare, it was *first directed against Satan*, and the powers of darkness. These he destroyed upon the cross, where he spoiled principalities and powers, and bruised the serpent's head. In so doing he destroyed him that has the power of death, but not death itself, for that enemy is yet to be overcome. Christ extracted the sting of death by his atoning sacrifice, made death itself subservient to his followers, and prepared the way for its final destruction, but the end is not yet.

2. In carrying on the war by the preaching of the gospel, it is *chiefly directed against sin*, whose destruction is begun by regenerating grace, and carried on in a life of repentance and self-denial; but it is through death that we obtain the final victory. Yet even in heaven, while our bodies are in the grave, the triumph is not complete, nor can it be till Christ has fully redeemed us. Psal. xlix. 15.

III. Death is an enemy doomed to be "destroyed."

The victory over it will consist in our being *raised from the dead* to a life of glorious immortality. The resurrection itself will be a victory, but it will be crowned and consummated with eternal life. The resurrection of Christ was an earnest of this, and ours will be the completion. 1 Cor. xv. 54—47. It would afford but little comfort to know that death itself should die, but its death and destruction involve our life. Here it is we see believers standing upon the neck of their enemy, and asking him triumphantly, Oh death, where is thy sting; oh grave where is thy victory.

The victory will not only be obtained at the resurrection, but that victory will be *decisive*. It will not be like a drawn battle, but the enemy will be wholly swallowed up, and utterly destroyed, to exist no more for ever. Hos. xiii. 14. Rev. xxi. 4.

It is in the faith of this, that believers obtain a partial victory even here. Rom. viii. 37—39. How needful then to abide in Christ, for he that seeketh our life seeketh his life, but with him we shall be in safety. 1 Sam. xxii. 23.

Let the unbeliever tremble, for if he meet death without Christ, he will meet him as an unconquered enemy, and must fall before him. To such the resurrection will yield no advantage, it will only be a preparation for the second death.

REDEMPTION BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.

Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.—Revelations i. 5, 6.

Christ is the object of praise and adoration as a divine person, being himself the Son of God; and there is also a glory attributed to him as Mediator, having redeemed us unto God by his blood. It is in the latter sense that glory and dominion are here ascribed to him, and let it be so ascribed for ever and ever. Amen.

I. We are led to consider what is implied in the text, namely, our polluted and defiled condition as sinners.

As coming out of the hands of our Creator, man was pure and holy, made after the image of God; but by sin we are become polluted. Yet men in general think nothing of sin, in any other way than as it affects the interests of society; and if free from outward offence, they then appear pure in their own eyes. But the defilement lies deep within, and out of the heart proceed all the evils of the life. Matt. xv. 19.

In particular, all the *springs of action* are defiled, all our thoughts, motives, and desires; so defiled as to pollute all our services and duties in religion. Even our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and we are become abominable in the sight of God. Job xv. 16. Hence all the threatenings and curses are against us.

The corruption of our nature is such, that we are totally unfit for the society of holy beings; and while unrenewed we cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Like the leprous person we are thrust out of the camp, and cannot be admitted till the moral malady is healed.

Yet sinners think but little of their condition, and feel quite easy and contented as they are. But if God shine into the heart, we shall soon begin to see and feel our vileness, and mourn over it. All that are taught of God, are made to know the plague of their own heart. We see in what a manner David loathed himself when brought to repentance, and he is only an example of what every other penitent is made to feel. Psal. li.

II. Consider what Christ has done for us: "he loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood."

He loved us——Love is the first moving cause of all, and therefore it is first mentioned: all that follows is the proper effect and expression of this love.

Love is the most estimable of all affections, and we generally value gifts and services done for us accordingly. If a person does ever so much for us, and not from love, it is but little regarded. Christ also

values our services by the same rule, and thinks nothing of what we do, except it be from love to him. In the same way we are taught to value all that he has done for us, and to conceive of it as in the highest degree interesting, because it is the effect of love.

There are two things worthy of notice in the love of Christ, and which render what he has done for us so precious and inestimable——(1) Its *freeness.* The love of Christ was fixed on us while we were yet sinners, while in our sins and in our blood, and antecedently to our being washed, which therefore could not be the ground or motive of his love. Ephes. v. 25, 26. Titus iii. 5.——(2) Its *strength* or fulness. The love of Christ was such, that he gave himself for us; and greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend. 1 John iii. 16.

Again: He hath *washed us from our sins in his own blood*——The expression is figurative, but very strong: he hath purified us at the expense of blood. By this is meant his laying down his life for us as an atoning sacrifice, and it implies that nothing short of this would take away sin. All ceremonial washings, all our prayers and tears, are utterly in vain; and nothing but the gospel can teach us how we are to be purified and made holy. Had it not been for the sacrifice of Christ, he that is holy, as angels are, should have been holy still; and he that is filthy, as men and devils are, must have been filthy still.

1. But why is our cleansing from sin *ascribed to the blood of Christ?* Not because of any physical or natural efficacy, but because it is the life, and it is the blood that maketh atonement. Lev. xvii. 11. The life of the sinner is forfeited, and the life of the surety must become the sacrifice. Without shedding of blood there is no remission. Heb. ix. 22. It was not the sufferings of Christ merely, but his death, that made the atonement; and it was necessary also in his death, that there should be the shedding of his most precious blood. 1 Pet. i. 19. Hence the evangelist is so careful to record the identical fact, that blood flowed from the Saviour's side while hanging on the cross. John xix. 34, 35. Hence also it is that our redemption is so repeatedly and emphatically ascribed to the blood of the cross. Ephes. i. 7. Col. i. 20. 1 John i. 7. Rev. v. 9.

2. What is there especially *in the blood of Christ that tends to cleanse from sin?* The blood of bulls and of goats could not take away sin; it was not therefore by blood merely as such; nor would the blood of any mere creature suffice, however exalted in the scale of being. It was the *deity* of Christ that gave it this cleansing power. 1 John i. 7. He by the sacrifice of *himself* purged our sins, who is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person. Heb. i. 3.

3. *In what manner does the blood of Christ cleanse us?* We need a double purification; the removal of the curse due to sin, and the removal of its pollution. It is for the sake of the blood of Christ that we are pardoned and accepted; and it is in virtue of this also that the Holy Spirit is given to renew and sanctify the mind, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The doctrine of the cross which gives peace to the mind, imparts also a spirit of purity.

4. *What then is needful to our being actually cleansed and pardoned?* Only that we believe in Jesus, and repair to the fountain open for sin and uncleanness. He is able to save all that come unto God by him, but none else. The annual atonement made for all Israel became effectual to those only who confessed their sins, and laid their hands upon the sacrifice; and none but the comers thereunto were benefitted by it. Those who reject the sacrifice of Christ must for ever remain unsanctified, and unforgiven, for there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin.

Having loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, Christ hath *made us kings and priests unto God and his Father*—— This denotes not merely what we shall be, but what we now are, a royal priesthood; and to this end he has washed us in his own blood, even as the priests of old were purified in the sacred laver, previous to their entering upon the sacerdotal office. Exod. xxix. 4. All believers are thus consecrated to the Lord, to draw near unto him, and to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable by Jesus Christ. 1 Pet. ii. 5. They are the only true worshippers in the spiritual temple, and it is theirs to minister before the altar, and before the throne.

Finally: For all this love and mercy we are taught to ascribe glory and dominion to Christ. To him belong the honour and the glory of our salvation, and all that we receive from him must be cast at his feet. Nothing is more congenial to the heart of a real christian, than that the Saviour should be supremely loved and adored; and in no ascription could he acquiesce with greater cordiality than this which is here given. "To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

DEITY AND ATONEMENT OF CHRIST.

Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.—Hebrews i. 3.

Some of the earliest corruptions of christianity consisted in entertaining low thoughts of the person and work of Christ: had it been otherwise, much that is found in this epistle would have been irrelevant. We have cause however to be thankful for what rose out of these corruptions, both in this epistle and the gospel of John.

The text contains a divinely magnificent account of the person and work of Christ, partly in relation to his antecedent character, or what he was originally; partly to his taking on him the office of a priest, to purge away our sins; and partly also to his consequent exaltation at the right hand of God. Let us briefly review each of these great and important subjects.

1. Consider what is said of the person of Christ, previous to his becoming our Saviour.

He is "the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of his person, and he upholds all things by the word of his power"—

If this be not descriptive of his being *truly God*, it is not in the power of language to convey such an idea. There is a great resemblance between this passage and that in Phil. ii. 6, where he is represented as being originally 'in the form of God, and thinking it no robbery to be equal with God;' and as that passage was intended to show the deep humiliation of Christ, in taking on him 'the form of a servant,' so the description in the text is designed to show what it is that gives value to his sacrifice, and dignity and importance to the whole of the christian revelation.

The antecedent *glory of Christ* is a subject on which the Scriptures delight to dwell, as may be seen in various passages. Mic. v. 2. John i. 1—3. 1 John i. 1, 2. It is on this principle that all the reasoning in this epistle rests, for this it is that places him infinitely above angels, i. 6—8; above Moses the lawgiver, iii. 4—6; and above Aaron the high priest, v. 4—6. The pre-existence of Christ was necessary to his assumption of our nature, and his pre-existent and essential glory rendered that assumption an act of infinite condescension. Heb. ii. 14—16. 2 Cor. viii. 9.

Let us attend to the meaning of the terms employed in the text, as far as we can comprehend them, for the subject is great and overwhelming.

1. Christ is here called *the brightness of the Father's glory*. The description is metaphorical, for it is not in the power of language to express what God really is, or to give a literal account of the divine nature. The allusion here is to the sun, sending forth its beams throughout the wide creation; and Christ is the emanation or effulgence of the divine glory. This perhaps is as just an idea as can be conveyed to us, of the union and distinction between the Father and the Son. He is in the Father, and the Father in him. God never was without a Son, any more than the sun in the heavens can exist without its beams; yet they are not so one as to admit of no proper or personal distinction. Christ is not the Father, yet there is such an equality, that he is emphatically "the brightness of his glory." It is also through him that the glory of the divine nature is revealed and made manifest. God made the world by him, and by him he saved it: the Lord Jesus is therefore the shining forth of all this glory.

2. He is *the express image of his person*, the image of the invisible God. Col. i. 15. This also is figurative, alluding to the likeness of a son to a father, only this likeness is perfect. There is not an attribute or a feature in the character of the Father but what is also in the Son. Here is likewise a personal distinction consisting with a oneness of nature, and without any other subordination than that which is relative, as between a Father and a Son.

3. Christ *upholdeth all things by the word of his power*. Nothing can be more expressive of his godhead, for this is claimed as the special

prerogative of God alone. Psal. lxxv. 3. Such then is the character of him with whom we have to do, as the apostle and high priest of our profession.

II. Observe what is said of his work in undertaking the office of a priest. "He by Himself purged our sins"—

This is expressive of the great object of his incarnation and coming into the world; and there are two things which demand attention—

1. *The efficacy of his sacrifice:* "he purged our sins." The term alludes to the ceremonial cleansings under the law, which were effected by sacrificial blood: ch. ix. 22. Hence David prayed, Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Psal. li. 7. Our being cleansed by the blood of Christ is the substance of all these typical purifications. 1 John i. 7, 9. By his death he removed the penal effects of sin, and through the application of it by faith, the conscience is purified. The gospel therefore connects repentance and the remission of sins, and proclaims forgiveness amongst all nations. Luke xxiv. 47.

2. The ground or *reason of this efficacy:* "He by Himself purged our sins." When the Scriptures speak of Christ's miracles, they usually ascribe them to the power and authority of the Father, rather than the divinity of the Son. So also in his sufferings he was succoured by the ministry of angels, and upheld by the power of God, seeing he had taken upon him the form of a servant, which required that he should act in subordination to him that sent him. Isai. xlii. 1. xlix. 8. But the Scriptures as uniformly ascribe the efficacy of his sacrifice to the divinity of his person, as giving value and virtue to his sufferings. It is the blood of Jesus Christ, as he is the Son of God, that cleanseth us from all sin. 1 John i. 7. He hath purged our sins by the sacrifice of "himself," and hence we see the necessity of Christ's divinity in order to the atonement.

III. The exaltation which followed upon his offering himself as a sacrifice for us. "He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

1. By "right hand of God" is meant the *first place in his favour.* None are so high in the esteem of the Father, either in heaven or earth, as Christ; none have such honours conferred upon them, or such favours granted at their intercession. In all things he is to have the pre-eminence, for he is before all things, and by him all things consist. Col. i. 17, 18.

2. This is mentioned as *an honour which became him.* Conscious that he had done the will of God, and finished the work which he had given him to do, the Lord Jesus went and took the place which belonged to him. He sat down on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him. 1 Pet. iii. 22. While all in heaven cry, Thou art worthy to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Rev. v. 12.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) Seeing that God hath provided for us an all-sufficient Saviour, let

us learn to trust him, and to call upon his holy name, remembering that there is salvation in no other. John iii. 35. Acts ii, 21. iv. 12.

(2) We see the way in which our sins are to be expiated and removed; not by tears or sufferings of our own, but by the precious blood of Christ, and that alone. Nevertheless, sin must be lamented and confessed, or it cannot be forgiven. 1 John i. 9.

(3) The exaltation of Christ, as the reward of his humiliation, is to us a source of a great encouragement. He is exalted as a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and the remission of sins; and is able to save all that come unto God by him.

(4) The conduct of Christ in doing and suffering the will of God, and then entering into his glory, is given as an example for our imitation. Heb. xii. 2.

PATRIARCHAL FAITH AND PIETY.

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.—Hebrews xi. 39, 40.

The Hebrews having been persecuted for Christ's sake, began to be weary and faint in their minds, and were for turning back to judaism; it is therefore with great propriety and force that the apostle introduces the noble army of patriarchs and prophets as witnesses to the faith of the gospel, and as affording an example worthy of imitation.

In particular the apostle intimates, (1) That old testament saints persevered, without having "received the promise:" and shall we turn back after seeing it actually fulfilled in the person and work of Christ? Also, (2) That this fulfilment of the promise was "a better thing reserved for us:" and shall we make light of it?

I. Consider the faith of the ancient believers, and the effects which it produced.

1. It had not always *the same immediate object*, yet it was invariably *founded on the word of God.* In some instances the immediate object was the promised Messiah, as in Abel's offering, ver. 4, and in the text. In others the promise of a heavenly country was the immediate object of faith, as in the case of Abraham and Moses, ver. 8, 24—26. In other instances it was the promises of temporal blessings, and in some it relates to past events, as in ver. 3. In some cases their faith had respect to the judgments threatened against a sinful world, and by this the conduct of Noah is highly distinguished, ver. 7. But all these things were testified and promised, and God's word was the exclusive ground of faith. It is not every persuasion, however strong, that enters into the nature of true believing; it must be founded on the

word of truth. Nor is it confined to spiritual things merely; we are required to believe in God for what pertains to this life, as well as that which is to come, and whatever is matter of promise is at the same time the object of faith.

2. The faith of ancient believers *prompted them to great and honourable exertions:* it was a living operative principle. Abel worshipped God by sacrifice. Enoch walked with God and pleased God. Noah prepared an ark for the salvation of his family. Abraham left his own country at the command of God. Moses forsook Egypt, and cast in his lot with God's afflicted people. They were all weaned from the world, and professed themselves strangers and pilgrims on the earth. We here see the true principle of obedience, and of all good works. All the great and good things done in the world, have been done by faith; and without it there is nothing good. Men may be active and laborious, but without faith nothing will be done for God. There is no true religion in our duties and services, but what is the fruit of faith.

3. The faith of the patriarchs wrought thus powerfully, *while they had not received the promise*, nor any signs of its being accomplished. When the thing revealed is some future good, it is given in the form of a promise; when past, of a testimony. We believe the gospel as a testimony, they believed it as a promise; but still they wrought wonders, persevered in their adherence to the truth, and all died in faith.

II. Notice the honour that is put upon their faith: "by it they obtained a good report."

Not so much however in their *own times*, or among their contemporaries, as in after ages. The patriarchs were highly esteemed while living, and wandered about in sheep skins and goat skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented. Even good men might not set a sufficient value upon them in their own times, any more than upon the apostles and martyrs, of whom the world was not worthy.

But however neglected they might be by their contemporaries, or the world in general, God has honoured them *in his holy word.* They obtained his approbation, and are enrolled in the book of life. Men are highly desirous of having their names transmitted to posterity, and recorded on the page of history: yet where now are the mighty dead? How soon forgotten, and their memorial perish with them! But those who have died in faith have obtained "a good report," and shall be had in everlasting remembrance. Mal. iii. 16.

II. The end of its being recorded is for our instruction and encouragement.

We have here examples of a life of faith, and of walking with God. In particular—

1. We are presented with an example of *confidence in God*, under dark appearances in providence, and of perseverance in the path of duty

amidst it all. Abraham went out, not knowing whither he went; and by faith Israel passed through the Red Sea as by dry land.

2. We have an example of *heavenly mindedness*, amidst the prospect of the greatest earthly fulness. Here is Abraham sojourning in the land of promise, as in a strange country, looking and waiting for the better world, ver. 9, 10.

3. Of *great self-denial*, and giving up all for Christ. Here is Moses esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt, ver. 24—26.

4. Of *invincible patience*, in bearing persecution. Even 'women' submitted to cruel tortures, not accepting deliverance; and would rather die than dishonour that holy name in which they believed, ver. 35.

5. Of *living upon God's promises*, though not performed; both the promises that were made to the church in general, and to particular individuals.

IV. Observe the wisdom of God in so ordering it, that one age of the church should not be made perfect without another.

No one that is past could do without others who come after them: the patriarchs looked to the times of David, David looked to the gospel times, and we are looking forward with hope and expectation to the times of the latter day glory.

On the other hand, no one that is future could do without the past. Abraham was the olive tree from which all should spring; and without the root, the branches could not exist. To the Jews pertained the giving of the law and the promises; and from them it is that we derive the lively oracles. The prophets sowed the seed which the apostles reaped, apostles prepared the harvest which we reap, and we are sowing the seed which those will reap who come after us. Thus there is an inseparable connection between the different parts of the mystical body of Christ.

If then our interest and our happiness be thus bound up together, what a motive is here for brotherly love, and for mutual exertions in the cause of God.

SUPREME IMPORTANCE OF HOLY LOVE.

He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.—1 John iv. 16.

John was distinguished for his affectionate disposition, he was also 'that disciple whom Jesus loved.' His writings breathe much of the same spirit, the love of God and of one another being his favorite subject. In the text he seems to speak his own experience; it is one of

those passages which contains such a depth of meaning that we cannot fully comprehend it. But it will be profitable if we can only understand a part of it, and therefore we shall

I. Attempt to explain the different expressions in the text.

1. "He that dwelleth in love." There is such a thing as dwelling in hatred, being hateful and hating one another. There is such a thing also as living in the world without feeling much of either love or hatred, being indifferent towards others, and wholly swallowed up in our own interest. And there is such a thing as dwelling in love, which is the object of our present enquiry. (1) It is *not every kind of love* that is here intended. The love of some persons terminates supremely in themselves; but this, so far from being virtuous, is the very essence of moral evil. There are also personal and family attachments, arising out of natural affection merely, without any love to God, or benevolence towards men. The same may be said of party attachments in religion, which generally have but little of the love of God in them. The love intended in the text is spiritual and holy in its nature and origin, resembling the love which God himself had manifested towards us. (2) It is *not an occasional attachment*, but an abiding affection, a "dwelling in love." There are many religious feelings which for a time at least resemble christian love, but afterwards wither away. The stony-ground hearers in the parable received the word with joy, and the Galatians manifested towards Paul the strongest feelings of attachment, esteeming him as an angel of God; yet these affections like many others were warm and vigorous only for a time, and soon withered away. But real christian love is an abiding principle, and one that never faileth.

2. He that dwelleth in love "dwelleth in God." This is one of those strong and expressive modes of speech, which is peculiar to this sublime and sacred writer. There is a manner of "dwelling in God," which is essential and peculiar to Christ himself, and which cannot be predicated of any mere creature. John xiv. 10. When believers are said to dwell in God, it denotes that oneness of interest, affection, and design, which our Lord desired in his intercessory prayer. John xvii. 21. We are said to dwell in another when we are of one heart with him, so as to love what he loves, to enter into his views and feelings, and to make one cause with him. When this similarity of disposition and design is carried to any great extent, it is as if one spirit possessed and animated two bodies, and both find a dwelling in each other's heart. Such is the idea conveyed in the text, and our being of one mind with God is the criterion of all true religion. God bears good will to all minkind, causing his sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and sending his rain upon the just and the unjust; and if we partake of the same benevolent disposition, we are his children, and dwell in him. Matt. v. 45. God also hates the evil, and cannot behold iniquity; if we are conformed to his moral image, we shall possess a similar disposition. God delights supremely in his only-begotten Son, and he is infinitely precious also to them that believe. 1 Pet. ii. 4, 7.

God loves the righteous, and delights to do them good; and so shall we, if we dwell in his love; then also shall we "dwell in him."

3. He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, "and God in him." He makes them his temple, his chosen habitation, where he manifests his presence and his glory. He becomes the source and the centre of their enjoyments; he fills their thoughts, affections, and desires; he preserves them from temptation, and sustains them under the ills of life; he dwells in them and walks in them, they become his people, and he is their God. By the indwelling of his Holy Spirit, God makes himself visible to men. His nature is essentially invisible, but his moral attributes are reflected in the temper and in the lives of holy men, and God is seen to be in them of a truth. 1 Cor. xiv. 25.

II. Improvement of the subject.

1. We see that the religion of the heart is the only *true religion*. It is not mere speculation, nor is it faith, unless it works by love. It is not our being nearer to the truth than others, in our religious sentiments; but our receiving the love of the truth, that we may be saved; and our loving others for the truth's sake, which dwelleth in them.

2. It is only by the prevalence of this religion, the very essence of which is love, that *the world can be blessed* and made happy. This will make wars cease, and bind all mankind together in one common brotherhood; will harmonize congregations, families, and neighbourhoods, and render society and individuals happy. The greater part of the miseries of the world arise from the want of that disinterested benevolence which the gospel inspires; and so long as the world is destitute of the true spirit of religion, it will never be otherwise.

3. The prevalence of that principle which constitutes the essence of the gospel, will account for all *the happiness of heaven*. It is love that inspires all, that crowns all, that fills all heaven with unutterable bliss. Oh how desirable to cherish, to cultivate, this holy and heavenly disposition, and to beware of interrupting its exercise, in ourselves or others. "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

GOD'S SALVATION THE JOY OF HIS PEOPLE.

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation—Psalm li. 12.

The petitions and confessions in this psalm are remarkably adapted to the case of a penitent. They afford such proof of deep and sincere contrition, that great as David's sin was, none but a hardened unbeliever can read them without seeing the man after God's own heart.

The prayer in the text intimates, that the psalmist had formerly been accustomed to rejoice in God's salvation; that of late he had lost this enjoyment; and that he could find no rest till it was restored.

I. Observe what is supposed to be the general tenor of a believer's life, namely, that of rejoicing in God's salvation.

Some professors seem to think that the highest or principal attainment in religion consists in a satisfactory persuasion of our own personal safety, and to know that our sins are pardoned. This no doubt is very desirable, but this does not appear to be the ground of David s joy, for he could not doubt of this after Gad the seer had said to him, 'The Lord also hath pardoned thine iniquity;' yet he prays in the text for the restoration of his former enjoyments. The truth is, that the joy of David's soul was immediately derived from God's salvation; and by this term is meant, not temporal deliverance merely, but eternal life through the promised Messiah. This was David's joy, both in life and in death. 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

Such also was the joy of all the old testament saints, and hence it abounded in proportion to the revelation they had of God's salvation; the more full and clear this was, the greater was their joy. Abraham rejoiced, but it was to see Christ's day. David also rejoiced, but it was in the prospect of his coming to Judge the earth. Psal. xcvi. 11—13. Isaiah and the prophets rejoiced, but it was in the coming of God's salvation. Isia. ix. 6. Zech. ix. 9. So likewise when the Saviour actually appeared, and more still after his ascension, the earth seemed like heaven to them that love him. Nor was it confined to his immediate disciples, for of all believers it is said, Whom having not seen ye love, and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. 1 Pet. i. 8. Such was the joy of scripture saints, and such will be ours if we be like them. We have the same gospel, the same Saviour, the same promises, and the same hopes.

More particularly—

1. Believers of old rejoiced in God's salvation, *as altogether free and full*, and therefore as suited to their condition. A salvation for the chief of sinners was Paul's joy, not only in the commencement, but in the close of his christian career. 1 Tim. i. 15. All primitive believers saw that salvation was freely given, and that it was all of grace; they had no idea of being willing to embrace God's salvation, and doubting at the same time whether Christ would save them. They saw that God had given his own Son for them, and inferred that he would with him also freely give them all things. John iii. 16. Rom. viii. 32.

2. They rejoiced in its *consistency with justice and righteousness*, and all the moral attributes of God. It was the joy of David, and also of the prophets, that he was the just God, and yet the Saviour; that the Redeemer was the Lord our righteousness; that he is just, and having salvation. Psal. lxxxv. 8, 10. Isai. xlv. 21. Zech. ix. 9. It was the joy of new testament saints, that God could declare his righteousness in the remission of sins, and that salvation was as honourable to his justice, as it was expressive of the riches of his grace. Rom. iii. 25. 1 John i. 9.

3. They rejoiced in God's salvation *as being everlasting*, as one that would meet all their wants throughout the whole of their existence. They should hunger no more, neither thirst any more; there should be no more curse, neither should they die any more, and sorrow and sigh-

ing should flee away. Let us but understand and receive this salvation, and all shall be ours.

II. Consider what it is that too frequently prevents our rejoicing in this salvation.

In the case of David we see the cause, and may therefore apply it to ourselves; for if we have not fallen into the same sins, yet every sin has the same tendency, and in a degree produces the same effect. Love of the present world, a conformity to its manners, associating with evil company, vanity of mind, negligence and slothfulness in holy duties; all these interrupt the joy of salvation, and make us barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ.

1. Carnality of mind takes away *all desire* after spiritual enjoyments. It destroys our relish for the holy Scriptures, for communion with Christ and his people; and so renders us morally incapable of rejoicing in his salvation.

2. It clouds and *obscures our evidence* of interest in these blessings. Paul stood in doubt of the Galatians, when he saw them slacken in their course; and it becomes us to stand in doubt of ourselves, when we have lost a savour of divine things. Our immediate duty in that case is not to rejoice and be confident, but to repent and do our first works. Rev. ii. 4, 5.

3. It draws down upon us the *divine chastisements*, and induces God to withhold the influence of his Holy Spirit. This is what David chiefly dreaded, ver. 11: for if God depart from us, where are we?

III. The importance of having the joy of God's salvation restored to us, when we have lost it.

1. Without it *we can have no other joy*, if we be christians in reality. Nothing on earth can satisfy us, if deprived of the joy of God's salvation. There is no going back again to the world, or to our former state: wicked men may do this, but good men cannot. John vi. 68. All the comforts of life, all the blessings of providence will be nothing to us, if things be not right between God and our own souls. Psal. lxxiii. 25.

2. Without this we shall not be able to bear up *under the ills of life*, and the sorrows of the present world. But when favoured with the light of God's countenance, and the joy of his salvation, we can do and suffer all things. Phil. iv. 12, 13.

3. Without this, what are all our *religious privileges?* We may read and hear the word, may come and go to the house of God, but it will be to little purpose; all will be dark and dead within.

There may be some who have never tasted of the joy of God's salvation, and never mourned the loss; but if so, it is a fearful sign of unregeneracy, impenitence and unbelief.

Others may have felt the influence of truth, producing conviction and sorrow for sin, unmixed with the joy of God's salvation. Their immediate duty is to come to Jesus, that they may find rest to their souls. Matt. xi. 28.

THE PROGRESS OF CHRISTIANITY.

And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour; other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.—John iv. 37, 38.

The immediate occasion of these remarks was the conversion of the Samaritans, and the readiness with which they received the word. Those who had laboured were Moses and the prophets, who died before the harvest came: the reapers are the apostles and primitive believers. The same principle of mutual dependence and subserviency is observable in the progress of Christ's kingdom.

I. Observe in what instances the saying in the text is applicable to us. " One soweth, and another reapeth: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours."

All this is true in reference to knowledge and science generally; we reap the benefit of all the discoveries made in former ages; but it is especially applicable to the progress of the gospel.

1. *Moses and the prophets*, who laboured for the apostles, laboured for us also. We enjoy the fruit as well as they, and the Jewish church is a great blessing to the church of Christ. The latter could have had no existence without the former, and they, without us, could not have been made perfect. Rom. ix. 4, 5. Heb. xi. 40.

2. The labours of *the apostles* have since been added, and we enjoy them. Their writings, from whence we derive all our knowledge of christianity, have been transmitted to us, together with the benefit of their example. And not their writings only, but we also enter into their labours, and are indebted especially to the ministry of the great Apostle of the Gentiles for the introduction of the gospel into Europe.

3. To many of *their successors*, who travelled into these parts of the western empire, and planted the gospel, we are also highly indebted. Christianity prevailed in England at a very early period, and great multitudes suffered martyrdom in this country, during the severest and the last of the ten persecutions, under pagan Rome. They laboured and suffered for Christ's sake, and we have entered into their labours.

4. Another set of labourers were raised up during the *dark ages of popery*, and who were in the end successful. Such were the Waldenses and Albigenses, in the valleys of Piedmont, and the south of France, who kept for ages the testimony of Jesus, while all the world was wondering after the beast. To them succeeded Wickliffe, Huss, Jerome, Luther, and other reformers, who laboured hard, and many of them sealed the truth with their blood. From them we have a bible translated, and the peaceable enjoyment of our religious privileges.

5. These were succeeded by *the Puritans and Nonconformists*, who laboured for many years under great hardships, fines, and imprisonments, and suffered even banishment and death. To them chiefly are

we indebted for the establishment of civil and religious liberty, as well as for many invaluable writings, which are likely to be coeval with the existence of the christian church.

6. We are also much indebted to *godly parents and ministers*, for their labours of love in the cause of Christ. Most young persons can look back with pleasure on their pious example, fervent prayers, and salutary counsel, as the principal means of producing their earliest impressions of religion, and of turning their feet into the ways of peace. Many flourishing congregations owe their existence to the painful and persevering efforts of our forefathers, the fruit of whose labour we now enjoy in quietness and peace.

7. Let us not forget to add, *the labours and sufferings of Him who died for us.* He trod the winepress alone, and laid the foundation of all our hopes; if we labour in his vineyard, or build upon the foundation which he has laid, it is to him we are indebted for all our success, and to him is all the glory due. It is his husbandry, and he is the Lord of the harvest, who sends forth labourers into his vineyard.

II. The obligations arising from this providential arrangement.

1. We are here taught to set *a proper value* on the labours of those who have gone before us in the work of the Lord. The opposite of this is the very essence of infidelity, which pours contempt upon the Scriptures, and insinuates that we should be wiser without them. Such also is the spirit of all unbelievers, who never read the bible, or regard it not, and are full of pride and self-sufficiency. But let us walk in the light of the Lord, and evermore say with the psalmist, Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel. Let us set a proper value upon the labours and the writings of uninspired men, who have been eminent in the church of God; for though they are not to become our oracle, they are nevertheless entitled to great respect.

2. Let us well consider the debt we owe to the present *descendants of Abraham*, for truly their debtors we are. From them we received the lively oracles, and also the Saviour; let them be beloved, therefore, for their father's sake. Rom. ix. 4, 5. Paul felt much kindness for them on this account, and longed for their salvation. Rom. x. 1. They were broken off that we might be grafted in, let us therefore pray that they may be grafied in again: xi. 24.

3. Let us prove ourselves worthy of inheriting the labours of our predecessors, by *following their example.* It was a law in Israel that they should transmit their religion to posterity, and let it also be a law to us. Psal. lxxviii. 5, 6. We live in times when great exertions are making for the spread of the gospel: and though we may not live to see the great things foretold in prophecy, let us nevertheless prepare the materials, as David did, and do it with all our might. Many who laboured for our good, laboured under great disadvantages, and with very little prospect of success; the times in which we live are more propitious, and pregnant with great events. We are ready to imagine that those who live in prosperous times have the greater joy; and so they have in the present world; but at last those who sow and those

who reap shall rejoice together, and that will form a bond of union. Isaiah might say to Peter and Paul, there were few that believed my report, or to whom the arm of the Lord was revealed: you were the happy men who saw the nations become obedient to the faith. But the others might reply, We came into the church with a harvest ready to our hands; we are indebted to you and to others under God for all our success.

4. Our present situation calls for *serious reflection,* lest it should prove a savour of death unto death, and all our superior advantages turn to greater condemnation. If our pious predecessors went on with their work in the midst of tribulation; negligence and supineness on our part would be utterly inexcusable. Oh let us pray to be followers of them, who after serving their generation by the will of God, fell asleep, and were laid unto their fathers.

UNIVERSAL CORRUPTION OF MANKIND.

We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lieth in wickedness.—1 John v. 19.

He that is spiritual is said to judge all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. He is like one who stands in an advantageous position, as seeing others without being seen himself. The true character of believers is unknown to the world, but the character and condition of the world is not unknown to them. The light of truth enables us to see both, as it is represented in the text, and the more so as believers have themselves been in both conditions. They were once of the world, though now distinguished from it.

I. Explain the various terms in the text.

1. *The knowledge* which is here ascribed to believers concerning themselves, does not so much refer to their consciousness of being believers, as it does to the moral and relative condition of such as are undoubted believers in Christ. If it meant the former, it would follow that christians could at no time stand in doubt of their own state; but as there was a state in which Paul stood in doubt of the Galatians, so there may be one in which we may be in doubt about ourselves.
The apostle supposes those of whom he speaks to be believers in Christ; as such they know themselves to be of God, and that all other ways would lead to death. The speculations of men are all uncertain, but the faith of Christ is being sure. There is a species of religion which consists in boasting of our privileges, thinking ourselves to be the peculiar favorites of Heaven, while we despise others. The language of the text is far from countenancing any thing of this sort, or any thing bordering upon vain glory. Its meaning is, that those who walk in the light of

truth can perceive their own path, and the path of others, and what the issue of both will be. It is therefore the language of genuine benevolence, and of heartfelt compassion for the souls of men.

2. Believers are represented as *knowing that they are of God.* This is expressive of a mutual relation and regard, as being of God's family, on God's side, and as belonging to him: ch. ii. 16. iv. 6. The language of the text classes the whole of mankind under two general divisions, the friends of God, and the friends of Satan; and supposes them to be of opposite principles, tending to an opposite result.

3. *The whole world* here means the whole human race, excepting those only who believe, and are renewed by the grace of God. The denunciation of so large a majority of mankind, and their proscription from the hope of salvation, may be thought to be highly illiberal; and others may imagine that there are many virtuous people in the world besides christians, and virtuous heathens too! But the language of the text is final and decisive: none are "of God" but those who believe in Christ for salvation, let their character and pretensions be what they may: and from this there is no appeal.

4. The most affecting part of the description is that of the whole world *lying in wickedness*, or in the arms of the wicked one, being under the power and dominion of Satan, and lulled into fatal security by his fascinations. He has infolded and seized them as his prey.

II. Illustrate and confirm the melancholy truth taught us in the text, with respect to the moral condition of the world.

Though "the whole world lieth in wickedness," yet all men are not wicked in the same degree. Some are heathens, some mahometans, some nominal christians; some foul and some fair characters; some following one sin, and some another. Yet all are under the power of the wicked one, and are of the same mind with him: all unbelievers, whatever be their disposition or behaviour, are of the mind of the wicked one, and not of God's mind. In confirmation of this, consider,

1. *The testimony of Him who knows us*, and who cannot be deceived. 'God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Every one of them is gone back, they are altogether become filthy, there is none that doeth good, no not one. Psal. liii. 1—3. Rom. iii. 10—18.

2. *Universal observation* also confirms the fact, of the general corruption of mankind. If we look into the history of all ages, and of all nations, we shall find it to be a history of crimes and misery. Even the judgments of God that have been abroad in the earth, have not prevented the wickedness of man upon it. All the miseries which wickedness itself produces, have not been sufficient to restrain it. All theories, both in morals and in legislation, have utterly failed of their object in making men wiser and better, unless they are founded on christian principles.

3. *Our own experience* tends to confirm the same affecting truth. 'We all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.' Ephes. ii. 1—3. Titus iii. 3.

III. The consequences arising out of the universal corruption of mankind.

1. Some would from hence infer that men are *not accountable* for their actions, and are not the proper subjects of religious address and exhortation. But conscience and common sense attest that we are accountable for voluntary actions, and that our depravity can form no possible ground of exemption or excuse.

2. Others would infer from such a state of things, that nothing is to be looked for but *absolute despair*. Of the salvation of any of the human race we might indeed despair, if Christ had not died, and the Holy Spirit had not been promised. But those who are now "of God," were once dead in trespasses and sins; and by the same power others also may be quickened.

3. Let such as are of God, endeavour *meekly to instruct* those who oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. 2 Tim, ii. 25, 26.

4. This subject demonstrates the certainty, that our salvation is and must be *all of grace*. Ephes. ii. 4—9.

JACOB BLESSING HIS SON JOSEPH.

Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall. The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel) even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb. The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of thy progenitors, unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.—Genesis xlix. 22—26.

The life of Jacob was highly interesting, and his death was no less so. To see an aged saint, a venerable sire, weather-beaten as it were with the storms of life, 'waiting for God's salvation;' to hear him speak adoringly of God and his salvation, and to witness his parental benedictions,—must have been peculiarly solemn and affecting to the numerous branches of his family. Gen. xlviii. 15, 16.

I. Consider the blessing of Jacob upon his beloved son.

1. It is expressive of *the fulness of his heart*. The predictions relative to many of the other tribes can hardly be called blessings, but this

is full of the most affectionate salutations. They arise chiefly from a review of Joseph's life, and hence there is much of history in the blessing pronounced upon him.

2. *The imagery* is partly taken from a vine situated near a well, and partly from an archer who shot with bows and arrows. The "vine" alludes to the meaning of his name, Joseph, which signifies fruitfulness or increase, both with respect to his family and his worldly prosperity. The "archers" refer to his adversaries, especially those of his own house.

3. In speaking of what Joseph met with *from his brethren*, great delicacy is observed, for they were then standing before him. They are mentioned in the third person, and under a figurative form of speech; yet they must sensibly feel it. "The archers sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him." Their arrows were those of envy and hatred. Psal. lxiv. 3. Joseph also is supposed to have had a bow, and to have shot at them; but his arrows were those of love, overcoming evil with good. They strengthened one another in an evil cause; but "the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob;" and thus he became the shepherd and the support of Israel, ver. 24.

4. Observe how he delights to dwell upon *the blessing of Joseph*, enlarging upon it, and enumerating the various kinds of good which it contained, ver. 25. In blessing him the patriarch intimates that his power of blessing was greater than usual, greater than that of his progenitors, Abraham and Isaac; and that it would not only extend to vast districts of the holy land, but to "the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills," ver. 26. All this good shall rest upon the head of Joseph, and that because of his having been sold into Egypt, and "separated from his brethren."

II. Notice the leading principle contained in this benediction, as applicable to other subjects; namely, that those who suffer and lay themselves out for the good of others shall in the end be abundantly blessed of the Lord.

According as Joseph had suffered for the good of others, so did his father delight to bless him and to see him honoured, even to the latest posterity. Thus also it is come to pass.

In this instance we may see,

1. The principle on which *God proceeds in blessing and honouring his well-beloved Son.* Look at *his sufferings* from the "archers," from men and devils, from his brethren, and even from his own disciples; denied by one, and betrayed by another. Thus was he "sorely grieved" and troubled, and the archers shot at him, and hated him. See also *the returns* he made for all, overcoming evil with good. When he was reviled he blessed, and prayed even for his murderers: Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Witness too how *God supported him*, "the arms of his hands being made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." He did not fail, neither was he discouraged; but endured the cross, and despised

the shame. Observe likewise *the honour* that was put upon him. God raised him from the dead, and gave him a name that is above every name. Phil. ii. 8—11. For the suffering of death he hath crowned him with glory and honour, and set him over the works of his hands. Heb. ii. 7—9. For his deep abasement he is become the object of adoration to the whole universe. Rev. v. 12, 13.

2. We here see the principle on which God proceeds *in blessing and honouring his servants.* Christ is pre-eminently the Lord's servant, Isai. xlii. 1: but there are others who have humbly followed his example, and have laboured and suffered for the good of mankind. Some have endured persecution; Paul and nearly all the apostle's died martyrs: others have suffered the loss of all things, and met with cruel mockings. When they received evil, they also returned good; and the weapons of their warfare have been made strong by the God of all grace. Such in the end will be blessed with more than common blessings, even to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. Such are faithful missionaries, who have been "separated from their brethren;" and the archers have shot at them, and sorely grieved them.

(1) Let us cast in our lot with the blessed Jesus, and we shall be blessed in him. Joseph was the shepherd and strength of Israel, notwithstanding the unworthy conduct of his brethren towards him: much more is Jesus the shepherd of his flock, and the foundation of his church and people.

(2) Let us learn to follow the example set before us. Those who serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and suffer for his sake shall in the end be blessed, and find an abundant recompense.

DOCTRINE OF DIVINE APPOINTMENT.

No man should be moved by these afflictions, for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.—1 Thessalonians iii. 3.

Great opposition was made to the introduction of the gospel into the city of Thessalonica, and Paul and Silas were compelled to depart by night for safety. Acts xvii. And though eventually a church was established, violent persecutions still continued. Paul felt and feared for these Thessalonians, and endeavoured in his epistle to fortify their minds against the various trials to which they were exposed; and for this purpose he exhibits in the text, the doctrine of divine appointment.

I. Notice the object which the apostle aimed to accomplish, namely, that christians should not be unduly moved by the trials of the present life.

It is not supposed that we should be unaffected, or unconcerned about

what may happen; this would not be natural, or proper. Grace does not extinguish the feelings of nature, it sanctifies and refines them. Good men have always felt the hand of God, and acknowledged it. Aaron held his peace at the loss of his two sons, but he mourned in secret; Job felt, and was resigned. The Thessalonians were troubled on every side, and were greatly "moved;" only let them not be moved away from the hope of the gospel.

Let us notice a few instances in which christians are in danger of being unduly moved by present afflictions—

1. When the loss of created comforts *sinks us into despondency.* There have been persons who on the death of a child or some near relation, have become inconsolable, and indulged a spirit similar to that of Saul when he lost his kingdom. They seem to think that they cannot be reconciled to the conduct of Providence: but this is truly an awful sign. It becomes us rather to remember that we hold upon an uncertain tenure all that is dear to us in life, and that all is forfeited by sin. We may lawfully retain what God has given us; but when he calls for it, we must cheerfully give it up.

2. If our trials unfit and *indispose us for holy duties,* except so far as natural infirmities prevail, we are unduly moved. If afflictions operate aright, they will rather help than hinder us in the duties of prayer, and in understanding the sacred Scriptures. It is also our mercy that the Lord has encouraged us to cast all our cares on him, and to call upon him in the day of trouble. But if like Rehoboam we say in our hearts, 'This evil is of the Lord,' and we begin to think hard of his conduct, it is a fearful sign that all is not right with us.

3. If afflictions *alienate our hearts from God,* or weaken our attachment to religion, the effect is highly injurious. Some who profess the gospel have been offended when persecution arose, and have lost all their zeal for Christ and his cause. Others when providence has gone against them, have turned their backs on God, and deserted their station among his people. Even good men have been so moved by the adversities of life, and the favour shown to the wicked, as to be under great temptations to atheism. Psal. lxxiii.

II. Consider the doctrine which the apostle teaches in order to accomplish his object, and that is, the doctrine of divine appointment.

This truth has been greatly abused by wicked men, and sometimes injudiciously applied even by good men; yet it has, nevertheless, been the means of reconciling and supporting the minds of the godly under their various afflictions. Job could say, 'He performeth the thing that is appointed for me,' and found relief in it. David also was happy to say, 'All my times are in thy hand.' Judah in captivity derived comfort from hence: 'Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not.' Lam. iii. 37.

But let us observe the fitness of this doctrine to preserve the mind from being unduly moved in times of affliction. To this end we must compare it with the idea, of all things coming by chance, or merely through human agency.

1. If every thing or any thing come by chance, *the hand of God*

could not be in it, and this would deprive us of a principal source of relief. To one that loves God it is a great comfort to see his hand in every thing that befals us. We can take well what he does, let the conduct of mankind be what it may. It is enough, and ought to be enough, that it is the Lord's doing: and let him do what seemeth him good. I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it, says David. When Job was deprived of all his substance by the Chaldeans and Sabeans, he was reconciled to the loss, because he saw that the Lord had taken away. To have every thing arranged and ordered by him whom we love, is all that we can desire.

2. If every thing that befals us came by mere human agency, *there would be little or no reason for it*, and therefore no motive to reconciliation or submission. The only remedy, in case things came by chance, or by mere second causes, would be that which unbelievers generally apply, and that is, endeavouring to forget the evils we are called to endure. So far indeed as things are supposed to come by human agency, there is often worse than no reason for them; for in proportion as the hand of man is in our troubles, we have to complain of injustice, oppression, and deceit; and if we could look no farther, there would be no such thing as cordial and voluntary submission. But if we consider all as God's doing, we shall find a reason and a 'wherefore,' in his contending with us. This may reconcile us, and do us good.

3. If what befals us came by human agency, or by mere chance, we might be *ever employed in disputing the authority from whence our ills proceed*, and be for taking all into our own hands. But if all proceeds from God, his authority is absolute and indisputable, and our times are in his hand. He will not, and it is right he should not, resign the government of the world into other hands; otherwise we should be for fixing our own lot, and reserving to ourselves the disposal of all events, rather than be subject to fate or chance. But it is to the glory of God, and greatly for our good, that we feel and acknowledge his absolute authority, and sink into nothing before him; that 'we be still, and know that he is God.'

4. If things were effected by second causes, or come by chance, *there would be little or no wisdom in them*, or that wisdom would be accidental. On the contrary, it is highly conciliating, to view every separate event as a part of one all-wise scheme; and to know that when our plans are frustrated, God's plan remains unalterable, and that the thoughts of his heart endure to a thousand generations.

5. If things were otherwise than they are, *no good could be expected to arise out of our afflictions*. None whatever could proceed from chance, and but little from human agency. But by viewing all as the effect of divine appointment, much of the goodness of God may be seen, and many beneficial purposes may be answered by them. God has also engaged that all things shall work together for good to them that love him, and has invited us to call upon him in the day of trouble, that he may deliver us, and that we may glorify him. According to the present system, all our present ills are the seeds of future bliss, and will be followed with a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

GOD'S COVENANT PEOPLE.

Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.—Psalm l. 5.

Amidst the terrors of the last judgment, we hear the voice of the great Shepherd calling to his flock, and gathering them together from the four winds of heaven. Thus, while earthquakes were shaking the city of Jerusalem, the angel said to the women at the sepulchre, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus who was crucified. In that tremendous day, God will have a regard for his friends; and then it will be seen of what importance it is to be a christian.

I. Observe the description given of the people of God: they are "his saints, who have made a covenant with him by sacrifice."

To be called "saints" is highly honourable; it is a name that distinguishes God's family, both in heaven and earth. God only is essentially holy, for there is none holy but the Lord. The angels also are called holy, and the spirits of just men departed are called saints, 'the saints in light.' The saints on earth are likewise said to be holy; and they are so in part, but in heaven all will be perfect and complete. Their sanctification, however, in this world, though initial only, is sufficient to denominate them saints.

This is the name for which the world hate them: they hate the thing itself, and therefore it is no wonder they deride those who in any measure possess it. Though hyprocrites may imitate it, and bring it into reproach, and though the ungodly may despise it; it is nevertheless true, that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Heb. xii. 14. It is neither outward decency nor a speculative faith, but a heart conformed to the will of God, and filled with the love of Christ, that constitutes the essence of true religion.

Another part of their character is, they have "made a covenant with God by sacrifice"—

1. A covenant is always expressive of *friendship between the parties.* Thus when Abraham and Abimelech entered into covenant, and sware to each other, it was the bond of peace and amity between them. When God also made a covenant with Noah and every living thing, and set his bow in the cloud, it was to give assurance that the world should no more be destroyed by water. And when a covenant was made with Abraham, it was a token of friendship and goodwill. Gen. ix. 12. xvii. 4.

2. Covenants were frequently *accompanied with sacrifice*, which rendered them a solemn and religious act. Thus when Laban and Jacob entered into covenant, it was solemnised by the offering up of sacrifice; and in general a curse was invoked, in case either of the parties should violate the engagement. Gen. xxxi. 52—54.

3. *Sacrifices under the law* were designed as a medium by which

the people of Israel should renew and ratify the covenant made with God on mount Sinai. Mere outward worshippers overlooked this, but the true Israel of God did not. They bound themselves afresh to be the Lord's by every sacrifice they offered, and as often as they approached the altar they dedicated themselves anew to his service. Psal. lxvi. 13, 14. cxvi. 17, 18.

4. Since the abolition of sacrifices, the great medium by which we enter into covenant with God is *the sacrifice of Christ*, once offered in the end of the world. Through him God can be at peace with us, for in his sacrifice he smells a sweet savour, as in Noah's offering. Ephes. v. 2. Hereby the Lord becomes our God, and we are made his people; and in this way only can we be at peace with him. Heb. viii. 10—13.

5. Every *memorial* of the death of Christ is a renewal of our covenant with God, and it becomes us to beware that we do not lightly regard it, or attend upon it in a formal manner. Every approach to the Table of the Lord, is an implied surrender of ourselves to him, and we thereby enter into an everlasting covenant, never to be forgotten. 1 Cor. xi. 25. Psal. cxix. 106.

II. The charge given by the Lord concerning his people when the world shall be destroyed. "Gather my saints together unto me"—

1. This charge is delivered to *the holy angels*, and is similar to that mentioned by our Saviour, when they shall gather together his elect, from one end of heaven to the other. Matt. xxiv. 31.

2. It supposes that the saints *are scattered* about in the earth, to the four winds of heaven. Such was the state of individual believers among the Jews, when he took them one of a city, and two of a family, and brought them to Zion. So in the last day they shall be found scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth. Hos. ii. 23. John xi. 52.

3. This charge is expressive of the difference that God will put *between the righteous and the wicked.* He hath done so in many former instances, which prefigured the last judgment. It was so at the time of the flood: Noah and his family were preserved in the ark, while the world was drowned. At the burning of Sodom, Lot was conducted by an angel to a place of safety. When Jerusalem was destroyed by the Chaldeans, a mark was set on the foreheads of the men who sighed and cried for the prevailing abominations. Thus also it will be with the saints in the last day; they shall be caught up together with the Lord in the air, while the earth and all its works shall be burnt up. Mal. iii. 17, 19. Matt xxv. 32, 33.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) We learn from this subject that the only religion which will avail, or exempt us from the wrath to come, is *a holy religion.* We must be "saints," or we cannot be saved. We may profess to be God's people, may come and bring our offerings; but if we enter not into solemn covenant with him, we are none of his, nor will he own us in the last day.

(2) The only holy people are those who make a covenant with him *by sacrifice*, or who come unto God by Jesus the Mediator, pleading for pardon and acceptance through him. The blood of Jesus only can purge the conscience from dead works, and there is no uncovenanted mercy for sinful man. The rejection of the atonement is the rejection of the covenant ratified by his blood. Matt. xxvi. 28.

(3) If we be the Lord's covenant people, we must *surrender ourselves* unreservedly to do and suffer all his will. We must take him for our God, and give up ourselves to be his people. 2 Cor. viii. 5.

(4) If thus consecrated to the Lord, we need not fear the terrors of *the last judgment.* He will gather us with his arm, his voice shall dispel our fears, saying, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

JUSTICE AND EQUITY OF THE LAST JUDGMENT.

And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself.—Psalm l. 6.

The occasion of proclaiming the last judgment, in the impressive language of this psalm, seems to have been the appearance of a large proportion of formal worshippers among the people of God, and the extreme depravity of the priests, ver. 16. The Lord, therefore, in awful displeasure, alarms these hypocrites, by threatening them with utter destruction, and calling them to serious reflection, ver. 22.

It is indeed a very humbling thought, that we are considered as criminals who are to be tried before the Judge of all the earth; and whether we view ourselves in this light or not, such is our real character and condition. It is appointed unto all men once to die, and after this the judgment.

I. Notice the awful description given of the last judgment.

This is a subject indeed that will not admit of any curious enquiries, as to the manner how, or the time when it will take place: but we know that there is a judgment to come, and that we are doomed to an appearance before God, whenever the summons shall arrive. Yet some things may be learned from this psalm, respecting the proceedings of that awful day.

1. *The criminals* to be tried are the professed people of God, such of them especially as are distinguished from his "saints, who have made a covenant with him by sacrifice;" for they are not all Israel which are of Israel. The Lord therefore will judge "his people," ver. 4. There is much false religion that must be brought to account, as well as impiety and irreligion; and a great deal of wood, hay and stubble that must be burnt up. In Christ's kingdom there are many things that

offend, and them that do iniquity: these must be eradicated, and the tares separated from the wheat. All the churches shall know that it is he who tries the reins and the heart: and if judgment begins at the house of God, where shall the wicked and the ungodly appear.

2. *The witnesses* to be summoned are the whole intelligent creation. "He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth," that he may judge his people. The sinner shall be tried in an open court, and ten thousand witnesses shall rise up against him; as many as have sinned before all, shall be condemned before all, and the eyes of the unwise shall be fixed on the transactions of that day.

3. *The accuser and the judge* is the God of Israel, who will open his complaint, and testify against us, ver. 7. There will not only be innumerable other witnesses, but God who is greater than all, and knoweth all things, will himself be the accuser and the avenger. Mal. iii. 5.

4. All this shall be attended with *awful grandeur:* "a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him," ver. 3. The appearance of God on mount Sinai, as the lawgiver, was very dreadful, but as the judge it will be still more so. 2 Thess. i. 7—9.

II. The equity of the divine proceedings. "The heavens shall declare his righteousness, for God is judge himself."

Awful as it may be for us as sinners to contemplate that solemn day, it is satisfactory to know that its transactions will all be founded in truth and righteousness. This is inferred with certainty from the character of the Judge, and the heavens shall openly "declare it."

1. If God be judge himself, *there will be nothing arbitrary in the proceedings of that day.* No man shall be condemned without cause, as if the Lord took pleasure in the death of a sinner, for that be far from him. Such things may happen where mortals fill the seat of judgment, but not where God himself is to preside. Neither will it be owing to any *previous purpose* existing in the divine mind, that a sentence of condemnation is passed upon the sinner. God has indeed determined that sin and misery shall go together, and that all the finally impenitent shall be banished from his presence; but this determination does not make men sinners, nor is it the cause of their condemnation. Every man shall be judged 'according to the deeds done in the body,' and by no other rule.

2. If God be judge himself, *there can be no mistake regarding character.* To condemn the innocent with the guilty, is an abomination to the Lord. The judgment which men pass on character is sometimes *too favourable;* they can judge only by the outward appearance, and may be deceived, but God knoweth the heart. We are liable to mistake in the opinion we form of some who appear amiable and circumspect in their deportment; of some who attend the gospel, and seem desirous to understand it; but God will bring them to account, and make it manifest that they had no real love to him, notwithstanding these favourable appearances. In other cases our judgment is apt to be *too severe.* We may see in the conduct of some so many defects, so much that is unlovely, and unlike the spirit of Christ, that we are ready to conclude

them to be utter strangers to God. But perhaps we know only a small part of their true character, and have viewed it only partially, for want of more wisdom, or better means of information. But in the proceedings of that day no errors of this sort can possibly arise, though some may be acquitted, and others condemned, in direct opposition to the judgment we had previously formed.

3. If God be judge himself, *there will be nothing unjust in his proceedings.* Judgment will be passed according to the different degrees of guilt, which will then be fully ascertained. All men are God's stewards; and as every man occupies a different portion of his Lord's goods, so of that he must give account. Men's *natural ability* will also be considered; and according to the use or abuse they have made of their faculties and opportunities, such will be their judgment. No man will be condemned for what was physically impossible: it is not the want of reason or understanding, but the abuse of them, that will constitute our guilt. Men's *advantages* are very different: some nations, some towns and cities, some individuals have not the gospel, while others possess it in rich abundance; and the greater will be the condemnation of those who have it, and improve it not. Let us recollect the fearful doom of Bethsaida and Chorazin, God will render to every man according to his works, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

REFLECTIONS.

(1) Think what a cause we have depending! Can we view the approach of this awful day with indifference, or pretend that it does not concern us? If God were to mark iniquity, where are we? And what reason have we to imagine that he will not?

(2) How needful, how desirable is an interest in Christ, and to have him for our advocate and our friend. What possible ground of safety can there be without this?

(3) How precious and invaluable are the sacrifice and righteousness of Christ, that can clear and justify us in such a court. How inestimable the Saviour, in the prospect of that day; and how unsearchable the riches of his grace, who is able to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy! Well may we unite with adoring saints and say, 'Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood—to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen.

THE CRUCIFIXION.

And when they were come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors; one on the right hand, and the other on the left.—Luke xxiii. 33.

How striking is the contrast between the conduct of Jesus, and that of his enemies. When they were come to Calvary, there they crucified him; and while they crucified him, he prayed for his murderers, saying, Father forgive them, for they know not what they do, ver. 34.

In offering a few remarks upon the text, there are three things particularly worthy of notice—the place where our Lord suffered—the nature of his sufferings—and the company in which he suffered.

I. Observe the place where our Lord suffered.

This is called Calvary, or Golgotha, a small eminence, about half a mile distant from Jerusalem. This was the common place of execution, where the vilest offenders were put to death.

Two things may be observed concerning this, one relating to the intention of the murderers, and the other affecting the intention of the writer—

1. The place where Jesus suffered, marks *the malignant design of his enemies.* It was not without some reason on their part that they fixed on Calvary; it was to render his name and character infamous, to express the greatest abhorrence of both, to sink and ruin his cause by affixing an indelible disgrace. Hence it was that the cross of Christ became a stumbling block to the Jews, and to the Greeks foolishness. But in this they were ultimately disappointed.

2. The place as mentioned by the evangelist, *marks his strong affection.* The sacred writer employs but few words, his narration is slow and solemn, and expressive of the deepest feelings of the heart. He points to the spot with peculiar emphasis, as Jacob did to the field of Machpelah, saying, '*There* they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah.' Gen. xlix. 31. Another instance of this form of speech occurs in the address of Ruth to Naomi: 'Where thou diest, will I die, and *there* will I be buried.' Ruth i. 17. Thus the evangelist points to Calvary, and with deep emotion says, *There* they crucified him.

3. We may also add that this directs us to *the place where we must look for mercy.* There they crucified him, and thence our salvation comes. There the great sacrifice was offered up, the ransom price paid, and the great atonement made.

> 'There hangs all human hope: that nail supports the falling universe.'

II. The nature of Christs sufferings: "they crucified him."

The sin of which the Jews pretended to accuse our Lord, was that of

blasphemy, because that 'he being a man, made himself God; and calling God his Father, he made himself equal with God.' By the Jewish law a blasphemer was to be stoned to death, and therefore they took up stones to cast at him; but being at that time under the Roman government, they had no power to put any one to death. They therefore brought him before Pilate, demanding that he should be crucified. The Roman law inflicted capital punishment by various other means, chiefly by decapitation; but crucifixion was fixed upon to gratify the malignity of the Jews, and the unrighteous judge yielded to their wishes.

In all this however the hand of God may be traced, and his wisdom seen in overruling these events for the accomplishment of his own purposes.

1. The death of the cross, though selected by Jewish malignity, would be *the fulfilment of prophecy.* The disciples were blind to these things when they happened, but afterwards they saw plainly that thus it was written, and that thus it behoved Christ to suffer. Prophecy had foretold that they should pierce his hands and his feet, Psal. xxii. 16; and also his side, Zech. xii. 10. John xix. 34, 37.

Our Lord also had himself foretold, in numerous instances, that he should be betrayed into the hands of sinners, and be crucified. John iii. 14. viii. 28. xii. 32, 33. He had also rendered the idea familiar by calling a profession of his name, with all the difficulties attending it, a bearing of the cross, in allusion to his carrying the cross to Calvàry. Matt. xvi. 24. Mark x. 21. Luke ix. 23. Hence also the doctrine of Christ crucified, as the only medium of our salvation, formed the very essence of the gospel itself. 1 Cor. ii. 2. Gal. iii. 1. vi. 14.

2. In our Lord's suffering the death of the cross, there was something *analogous to what we as sinners had deserved;* and probably it was with a view to represent this, that the Jews were suffered to crucify him—

(1) It was a *lingering death*, and the Romans appear to have invented this mode of punishment on purpose to render death as dreadful as possible. In the case of our blessed Lord it was six hours, from the commencement to the end of the crucifixion, when, having power to lay down his life, he voluntarily gave up the ghost; but the malefactors had not then expired, and would probably have survived many hours longer. Mark xv. 44. John xix. 33. All this time the sufferer would experience the most insatiate thirst, from the extreme anguish so long endured. Psal. xxii. 15. lxix. 21. John xix. 28. And in this lengthened pain and anguish there was something that represented the endless punishment of the wicked, the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched,

(2) It was a most *painful death*, more so perhaps than any other that human malignity could devise. The wounds were all inflicted on the tenderest parts of the human body, but not so as to affect the seat of life. In the act of fixing the cross in the ground, with the sufferer suspended on it, his joints would be dislocated by the shock; and thus another prophecy would be fulfilled. Psal. xxii. 14. These exquisite sufferings would shadow forth those torments of hell, in which

the sinner shall thirst in vain for water to cool his tongue, and where the everburning sulphur is unconsumed.

(3) The death of the cross was attended with *reproach and infamy;* none so painful, so ignominious as this. He was made a spectacle to angels and to men, and they that passed by wagged the head in derision and contempt. Yet he endured the cross, and despised the shame. In this also there was a prefiguration of that public disgrace and overwhelming shame, which the righteous judge has awarded as the punishment of sin. Dan. xii. 2. Isai. lxvi. 24.

(4) The death of the cross was an *accursed death*, both in the esteem of God and man. Gal. iii. 13. And the sentence to which sinners are doomed is, that they are to die the death, to die under the curse. Hence Jesus would come under the law, and into our place and stead, and so was made a curse for us.

III. The company in which he suffered: they crucified with him "two malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left."

1. On the part of his enemies this was designed to render his death still *more ignominious and shameful*, and was no doubt contrived between Pilate and the chief priests. Our blessed Lord was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners; but now to overwhelm him with shame and public disgrace, they associate him with "malefactors." Not content with this, they place him in the midst, to insinuate that he was the worst of the three. Here every circumstance tells, for every thing was intended to heighten the disgrace. This arrangement might also be contrived for the purpose of discomposing his mind, during his last moments, by filling his ear with the blasphemies and reproaches of the dying malefactors. When we come to die, the least comfort we hope for is a peaceful pillow, and the presence of a sympathising friend. But here is the blessed Saviour, surrounded by an enraged populace, and expiring on the cross, amidst the execrations of his enemies, and the groans of dying malefactors.

2. But on the part of God we may see something of *the wisdom of this appointment.* Prophecy was hereby fulfilled, which said that he should be numbered with transgressors. Isai. liii. 11. Mark xv. 27, 28. By this means also the virtue of his sacrifice was made more fully to appear. Had two of his disciples been crucified with him, instead of two malefactors, it might have been imagined that they had contributed something to the efficacy of his sufferings: but as it is, it would appear that his own arm brought salvation, and his righteousness it sustained him. He trode the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with him. Isai. lxiii. 3. Also by suffering in such society, an opportunity was given for the fuller display of his power and grace, in saving one of the malefactors in his last moments, and taking him from the cross to the paradise of God. Moreover, the publicity of his crucifixion, rendered the evidence of his death more certain and indisputable; so that his enemies could not pretend that there was any collusion; and that which established the reality of his death, established also the reality of his subsequent resurrection, on which all the hopes of his followers depend.

DEVOTING OURSELVES TO THE LORD.

And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves unto the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.—2 Corinthians viii. 5.

Paul, in exhorting the Corinthians to the exercise of christian beneficence, reminds them of the unbounded liberality of their brethren in Macedonia, who had in this instance far exceeded his expectations; and he finds a reason for it, in their having first devoted themselves unreservedly to the Lord.

Two things in the conduct of these christians are particularly worthy of notice, and also of our imitation.

I. Their surrender of themselves to the Lord.

This is the first step in the path of christian obedience, and the essence of true conversion. If this be not done, we are not proper subjects for christian fellowship; and giving ourselves to one another without this, will be of no account. We should be unfit for, and soon be weary of, the duties and privileges of such a connection.

1. Giving ourselves to the Lord *must be done willingly*, and with all the heart. We may devote ourselves to the service or interest of men with reluctance, or from necessity; but the Lord requires the surrender of the heart, and nothing but this will do. Great sacrifices may be made for the interests of religion, and large sums subscribed, from selfish or mercenary motives; but whatever be done for God must be done freely, and from love to him, or it cannot be accepted. Men may expend their property or their zeal upon his cause, but without a regard to his glory it is nothing worth.

2. The surrender must be *unreserved*. Not only all that we possess, but our "ownselves" must be given to the Lord. Many things may be given, and many sacrifices made; and yet we may not at any time give *ourselves* to the Lord. Some persons will give good things and money also; but they must be free and independent, and not come under any personal obligation. This is a reason why many stand aloof from church communion, and do not choose to be connected with any society of christians; but true love makes no reserve. It cheerfully devotes all to God, and casts in its lot with his people. Heb. xi. 25.

3. It must be *irrevocable*. What is consecrated or given to the Lord can never be recalled, but the vow must be performed. When Hannah devoted her son Samuel to the service of the temple, it was forever; and if any one enters into covenant to be the Lord's, like the Hebrew servant he must go out free no more. Such give themselves to live and die in his service, and to be his for ever; nor can they violate their engagements without danger and disgrace.

II. The surrender of themselves to the Lord's people, to perform all christian duties "according to the will of God."

Those who join in christian fellowship do not come under an engagement to do whatever their brethren may happen to require, any farther than as it is agreeable to the will of God; and to this every individual is bound to submit. This state of mind is of great importance, and nothing more should be necessary to prompt obedience, than the evidence that this or that is required by the Scriptures. Primitive believers did not ask whether the duty was easy of performance, whether it would subject them to reproach, or whether they might not be saved without it. They never thought of such enquiries; all their concern was to know the will of God, and to do it; and this only is true religion.

If this principle govern our conduct, in giving ourselves up to the Lord and to his people, we shall be particularly mindful of the duties which such a connection demands. (1) We shall be constant in our attendance on public ordinances, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. (2) We shall pray one for another, and love as brethren. (3) What we contribute to the cause of Christ will be done freely, and according to our ability. (4) If offences arise we shall go and tell our brother of his fault alone, and not spread it abroad. Matt. xviii. 15. (5) We shall be ready to receive as well as to give an admonition. Psal. cxli. 5.

THE POWER OF ABSOLUTION.

Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.—John xx. 23.

The Lord Jesus being risen from the dead, now renews the commission to his disciples in this very solemn and impressive language. It might seem indeed too much to be addressed to mortal men, and great abuses have arisen out of it. Mercenary ecclesiastics have claimed the power of absolution, have required a confession for that purpose, and made it subservient to worldly and political interests. Nevertheless there must be some important truths taught us in the text, which it behoves us carefully to understand. We shall therefore,

I. Attempt to explain the power of absolution, as vested in the disciples of our Lord.

1. It is necessary to observe, that the commission is addressed to them *as men inspired*, who had received for this special purpose the gifts of the Holy Ghost, ver. 22. They were therefore rendered infallible in the judgment they passed on character, whenever they pronounced remission; but this is what no one can pretend to now, and therefore to no one is this power applicable.

2. Though the apostles were inspired, yet the way in which they could "remit or retain sins," was *not efficiently, but ministerially only*,

by declaring the doctrine of Christ on the subject of forgiveness. They pronounced pardon or condemnation, not on individuals, but on character only. The Lord himself claims it as his own prerogative, and none can forgive sins but God only. Isai. xliii. 25. Mark ii. 7.

3. *The doctrine of the apostles still retains this power*, and every one who faithfully teaches that doctrine may be said, ministerially, to pronounce forgiveness or condemnation; but it is not on persons, but on character. All that repent and believe the gospel are declared to be forgiven, all that live and die in sin are under condemnation, and from this there is no appeal. John iii. 36.

II. Consider what is implied in this doctrine of absolution.

1. That wherever the gospel comes it finds *all men sinners*. The gospel is emphatically the religion of sinners. Christ came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance, to seek and save that which was lost. If any one therefore come to him in any other character, he shall find nothing. We must not think of recommending ourselves to the Saviour by any thing that we can do; we must be given freely, if at all, and for his name's sake; and no other way of forgiveness would meet our circumstances. Luke vii. 41, 42.

2. It implies that the leading design of the gospel is to make known *the way in which sin can be forgiven*. It is from hence called the preaching of repentance and remission of sins among all nations, Luke xxiv. 47; and the ministry of reconciliation. 2 Cor. v. 18, 19. Rom. iii. 25.

3. That the remission of sins is *not proclaimed and promised to all men*, for some who hear the gospel may nevertheless have their sins "retained," or bound upon them. It is not a general amnesty, or an indiscriminate absolution, but of such only as embrace the gospel and the Saviour.

4. That *the criterion* by which we are to judge of our sins being remitted or retained, is *the apostolic doctrine*, and not any inherent persuasion or impression on the mind that such is indeed the fact. Whose soever sins the apostles' doctrine remits, they are remitted; and whose soever sins it retains, they are retained.

III. Enquire whose sins are remitted, and whose retained, according to the apostles' doctrine.

1. The apostles every where taught, *that repentance and faith are essential to the forgiveness of sins.* This indeed is the current language of the New Testament, and there is no forgiveness in any other way. Luke xxiv. 47. Acts iii. 19. v. 31. Sometimes believing only is mentioned, as in Acts xiii. 39; but one implies the other, for repentance and faith are inseparable. Those who repent and believe the gospel, and those only, have the forgiveness of sins. John iii. 18. Rom. viii. 1.

2. All do not repent and believe the gospel, and therefore *their sins are still retained*, and the wrath of God abideth on them. John iii. 36. It was placed there by the law, but by a rejection of the gospel the sen-

tence is become irreversible. Those who are now condemned by the apostles' doctrine are bound over to destruction, and nothing shall be able to deliver them. It may seem hard that so many wellmeaning and welldisposed people should not go to heaven at last; but such is the immutable and unalterable decree of Heaven, 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.' Mark xvi. 16.

Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him. Psal. ii. 10—12.

PRE-EMINENT GLORY OF THE GOD OF ISRAEL.

Oh Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth: who hast set thy glory above the heavens.—Psalm viii. 1.

Moses in his dying song celebrated the glory of the God of Israel, as the shield of their help, and the sword of their excellency. David also and all the saints have gloried in his holy name, and this may be considered as the test of true religion.

I. Endeavour to illustrate the meaning of the text.

1. The seeming *repetition* of the name of the Lord, is not so in reality; the meaning is, "Oh Jehovah our Lord." Jehovah is the appropriate name of the God of Israel, and that by which he is distinguished from all false gods, though he had not condescended to make himself known by it previously to the time of Moses. Exod. vi. 3. The ancient Jews esteemed the name Jehovah so sacred that they did not dare to pronounce it, but substituted the word Lord instead; and it seems as if our translators have done the same, in various passages of the Old Testament. The word Jehovah expresses the self-existence of God, and what he is by nature: the term Lord denotes his dominion and authority. Other nations had gods many, and lords many; but Israel had Jehovah for their Lord, the only true and living God. 1 Cor. viii. 5, 6.

2. The "Name" of the Lord signifies *his revealed character.* We should know nothing of God aright, but for the revelation he has given of himself; and as he has been pleased to make himself known to us under various names, so it is by the union of these that his whole character is expressed. By the name of the Lord therefore is meant all his natural and moral perfections, as they are made known to us in his word, and in his works. It is not merely expressive of what Jehovah is, but of what he has manifested himself to be, and that so far as we are capable of comprehending his unsearchable perfections.

3. To the name of the Lord *is ascribed an excellency*, as in Deut. xxxiii. 26—29. The term is comparative, and relates to all

others that are called gods. The names lord and god are given, not only to angels and heathen deities, but also to kings and governors. But what are lords and kings, in comparison of the supreme Ruler? And what are all the gods of the heathen? Even in their own account they are neither wise nor mighty: and as to *moral* "excellence," they pretend to none. But the Lord our God is *holy*. Hence it is that even heathens have acknowledged 'that their rock is not as our Rock, themselves being judges.' Deut. xxxii. 31. The Babylonians also witnessed of Daniel, that the spirit of 'the holy gods' was in him, a spirit which they had never known. Or if we unite all the *real excellencies* that are found in good men, and also in angels, they are as nothing when compared with the excellency of Jehovah. What is the wisdom of ten thousand Solomons, the uprightness of ten thousand Jobs, and the love of as many Johns, when compared with the wisdom, the righteousness, and the love of God our Saviour.

4. The *extent of his excellency*: it is "in all the earth," diffused throughout all his works of creation and providence. The psalmist did not intend to overlook what God is in Israel, for his glory was there displayed with peculiar lustre. Psal. lxxvi. 1, 2. God was known as a refuge, a very present help in trouble. Psal. xlvi. 1, 7, 11. But the glory of Jehovah was not confined to Israel: it was seen "in all the earth." Their God was not like the tutelary deities of the heathen, who were imagined to preside over particular districts, with a limited influence; but his dominion extends over all the earth. When the Assyrians came and dwelt in Samaria, they supposed the land of Judea had a local divinity presiding over it, as in their own country, and therefore wished to propitiate his favour, 2 Kings xvii. 26: but the Babylonians in Daniel's time became convinced that the God of Israel was indeed 'the God of heaven and earth.' Dan. iv. 34—37. The heathen mariners with Jonah also feared him as the God of heaven. Jonah i. 9, 14. The Ninevites likewise did the same, for no sooner had the prophet delivered his message, than they humbled themselves greatly before the Lord.

5. Not only was the name of the Lord become excellent in all the earth, but *his glory also was above the heavens.* The starry heavens were among the objects of heathen adoration, and hence many of the planets retain the names of heathen deities to this day. Deut. xvii. 3. Job xxxi. 26. But Jehovah is above them all, for he made them. How great then is his condescension, that He who is the high and lofty one, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, should dwell with man upon the earth, and take up his abode with the humble and the contrite.

II. Attempt some improvement of the subject.

1. If the name of the Lord was glorious in the view of old-testament saints, how much more ought it to be so in our view, seeing it has been since displayed in still more amiable forms, especially in the face of Jesus Christ. Here all the divine perfections meet together, and shine with the brightest effulgence. Heb. i. 3. Here we see him as a refuge, as a pardoning God, full of compassion and gracious.

2. How much should we be concerned to make his glory known to others, by the spread of the gospel, and by every means of disseminating religious truth. Multitudes are ignorant of his holy name, at home and abroad, and are still perishing for lack of knowledge.

3. We are here instructed in the nature of true religion, and that its immediate tendency is to produce an admiration of the perfections and character of God, especially on account of his holy excellency. An unbeliever may admire the wisdom and beneficence of the creator, but it is the christian only that loves his *moral* attributes, and adores him on account of his infinite holiness.

4. We here see the importance of a proper acquaintance with the divine character, both as to the origin and progress of true religion. It is the commencement of eternal life to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent; and grace and peace are multiplied by the same means. John xvii. 3. 2 Pet. i. 2. Nothing tends like this to abase our pride, to promote repentance, and inspire confidence in God.

JESUS SHOWING MERCY TO THE PARALYTIC.

And behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.—Matthew ix. 2.

A few days only before this event, our Lord had crossed the lake of Gennessaret to visit the country of the Gadarenes, where he healed a miserable demoniac; but the people desiring him to depart out of their coast, he was now returned to Capernaum, where he sought a little repose from his labours. But the notoriety of his miracles brought great numbers to Peter's house, which was thronged and crowded to excess. The persons who brought the paralytic, being unable to approach, determined to gain access by unroofing the house, and letting down the helpless individual on a bed, and thus placing him at the feet of Jesus. Mark ii. 1—4.

I. Notice a few things generally in the passage before us.

The afflicted state of the patient—the faith of those who brought him—and the conduct of the Saviour towards them.

1. Observe *the afflicted state of the patient;* "a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed." He seems to have laboured under a universal paralysis, and to have been in the last stage of the disease; totally helpless, and almost without hope. This was indeed a desperate case: and now if Jesus can heal and save him, who need despair? We are here also very impressively taught that no case is so bad, whether corporeal or spiritual, but we may bring it to Jesus; and the worse it is the more need we have to come to him. Here also we see whither we are to go for relief, in times of deep distress.

2. The *faith of those who brought him.* It was indispensable to a miraculous cure, as it is indispensable to salvation, that the applicant should believe in the infinite ability of Christ to heal and to save; and they were told that all things are possible to him that believeth, but that without faith there is nothing possible. The proof given in this instance was very strong: both the paralytic and those who brought him were so fully persuaded of a cure, that they employed the most extraordinary means to gain access to the Saviour; who "seeing their faith," immediately manifested his mercy towards them. In this instance we see how good it is to be connected with those who believe in Jesus. When sick, and unable to help ourselves, they can spread our case before the Lord; and innumerable are the kind offices which piety performs on behalf of those we love.

3. The *conduct of the Saviour* on this occasion. He first pardoned the afflicted man, and then healed him; and this, as it appears, without any direct prayer offered for that purpose. The poor man, probably unable to speak, said nothing, and his friends said nothing; they laid him at the feet of Jesus, and left his emaciated form to tell the tale of woe. There is, however, something remarkable in the conduct of our Lord, in forgiving sin apparently unasked, and in doing this before he healed the paralytic. The following reasons may perhaps account for this singular exercise of mercy—

(1) Christ pardoned before he healed, in order to show *the fulness of his grace*, in doing for us exceedingly beyond all that we can ask or think. The poor man came for bodily relief, and gets a blessing on his soul; he came for healing, and obtains the forgiveness of all his sins.

(2) In first exercising his pardoning mercy, he pointed out the immediate *source of all our sorrows*, and that is sin. Had we never offended, we should not be liable to affliction; he therefore removes the cause, that the effect may cease.

(3) It was done to show the superlative *importance of forgiveness;* that is done first, which of all other things is most necessary. It was desirable for the poor man to be healed of his sickness, but more so to be forgiven; and if sin were but pardoned, the sickness might be endured, had he even returned as he came, a paralytic still.

(4) Though this mercy was shown, without any audible petition; yet Jesus who "saw their faith," beheld also *the burden* which pressed upon the soul of the afflicted, and therefore hastened to afford immediate relief. Though the penitent said nothing, his looks testified what he wanted, and Jesus meets the first wishes of his soul.

(5) The miracle of healing was reserved to the last, in order to obviate *the objection of his enemies*, many of whom were waiting for an occasion against him. The wonderful miracle performed on the paralytic would not only tend to confirm his faith, but would demonstrate, to the confusion of his enemies, that the Son of man had power on earth to forgive sin.

II. Add a few remarks, suggested by the text, on the doctrine of divine forgiveness.

Here we may observe,

1. *Its universal importance.* It is a blessing in which we are all interested, for we have all sinned, and come short of the glory of God; and if not forgiven, we must perish under the curse. The blessing itself has been procured at an infinite expense, a greater price has been paid for our forgiveness than the whole universe could give, and God has hereby testified its pre-eminent importance.

2. *The way in which forgiveness is to be obtained.* Not only in the text, but throughout the Scriptures, it is inseparably connected with faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, which invariably includes repentance towards God. Sinners may think of many other ways, but they shall not prosper. Sometimes they hope to make amends for evil committed by something good to be done by them, sometimes by something ceremonial instead of true repentance, by deeds of charity to the poor, or something given to the cause of religion; and when they come to die, they hope all this may do. But it will not; for he that believeth not on the Son of God shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. John iii. 26.

3. Where repentance and faith are found, *the greatness of our guilt shall not prevent forgiveness.* Of this there are numerous examples in the Scriptures, selected from among the very chief of sinners, in order to afford the utmost encouragement to the penitent and believing. In the text an instance is given of pardoning mercy to a sinner of Capernaum, a city devoted to destruction for its unbelief; and afterwards even the sinners of Jerusalem obtained mercy. Indeed, there it was that the doctrine of forgiveness was first preached, by the special command of the risen Saviour. Luke xxiv. 47. Let but the sinner seek the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; let him but return unto our God, and he will abundantly pardon. Isai. lv. 7.

III. Consider the joy which a sense of pardoning mercy will occasion: "Son, be of good cheer," said our Lord; "thy sins be forgiven thee."

It is this truth that fills the gospel with good tidings of great joy to all people; and the preaching of forgiveness among all nations, is the same thing as preaching the gospel to every creature which is under heaven. The gospel alone is the religion of sinners, and that which gives it such an adaptation is, that it proclaims peace and pardon to a ruined world. 2 Cor. v. 19.

1. The forgiveness of sins implies *peace and reconciliation with God,* a reconciliation so perfect and entire, that it is as if no breach had ever existed. And if God be for us, who can be against us? All his promises and all his providences shall work together for our good; and thus to be at peace with the great Governor and final Judge of the world, provides an ample source of joy and gladness. Cheerfulness without this is only a delirium, and like the crackling of thorns under a pot. Eccles. vii. 6.

2. It is a sense of forgiveness that *removes the fear of death,* and

tranquilises our departing hour. Where sin is pardoned, the sting of death is extracted, and its bitterness shall not be tasted. John viii. 51. Death opens to the pardoned sinner the portals of heaven, and introduces him into the presence of a reconciled God. Thousands of worlds are poor, compared with this! But how indescribable the anguish of such, whose guilt lies upon the conscience unpardoned in a dying hour.

3. The forgiveness of sins *divests a future judgment of its terrors*, and enables the believer to be looking and waiting for the Son of God from heaven. 1 Thess. i. 10. The coming of the Judge can be terrible only to the guilty: and oh how terrible to meet the final Judge in an unpardoned state? But if our conscience be sprinkled with the blood of Christ, we may look forward with the serenity of hope to that awful day. Luke xxi. 27, 28. Rom. viii. 33, 34.

4. The pardon of sin is *connected with every other blessing*, and includes the whole of our salvation. We are then prepared to live, and prepared to die; prepared for all in this world, and that which is to come. It shall go well with us in life, in death, and to eternity.

(1) Let those then who are interested in this blessing be *cheerful*. If we have trials, let us bear them; if reproached for Christ's sake, let us take it patiently. The pardon of sin is sufficient to afford us full content.

(2) Let us remember that a sense of forgiveness can only be *preserved* by the exercise of repentance, and coming daily to the blood of sprinkling. Deep and habitual humilation for sin, is necessary to an abiding sense of forgiveness and acceptance with God. 1 John ii. 1, 2.

(3) Let the impenitent and unpardoned *mourn and lament*, for the time is coming when all their fancied joy will be turned into the bitterest woe. When the graves are ready for you, and the time of your departure is at hand, all your giddy mirth will be exchanged for weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Luke vi. 25.

MOTIVES TO HEAVENLY-MINDEDNESS.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.—Colossians iii. 1. 2.

Every doctrine of the New Testament has its practical use and application; and the exhortation in the text is an inference from what is taught in ch. ii. 12, 13.

There are three senses in which believers may be said to be "risen with Christ." (1) By faith, being quickened and made alive, in virtue of union with Christ. (2) By baptism, which is a figurative resurrection. (3) By representation, Christ being risen as the federal head of all his people. Hence it is that spiritual mindedness is required, and setting

our affection on things above, as corresponding with the new life derived from Christ.

I. Explain the exhortation: "Seek those things which are above—set your affection on things above."

1. *Seek those things which are above.* Seeking spiritual blessings is sometimes expressive of the *beginning* of the christian life, sinners being encouraged to seek the Lord, with a promise that they shall find, and that their souls shall live for ever. Psal. lxix. 32. Isai. lv. 6. Matt. vii. 7. Seeking the Lord is sometimes expressive of the *whole* of true religion, and as the chief employment of the christian life. It is in this state that we must seek, if in the next we hope to find; and this seeking must be continued to the end of life. Psal. xxiv. 6.

2. *Set your affection on things above.* This is necessary in order to our seeking them, for no one would earnestly seek after that which he does not love. Many objects solicit our affections, as pleasure, honour, wealth, and applause. God also, and things above, solicit our hearts. If we wish to know to which it is we yield, let us remember that whatever we set our affection upon will be supreme, and other things be rendered subservient. It will be the same, if we truly love and seek the things that are above. This holy attachment will make us strangers and pilgrims on the earth, like the patriarchs of old; and enable us to deny ourselves of present good, as Moses did, for Christ's sake. Heb. xi. 25, 26. Phil. iii. 8. If we set our affection on heavenly objects, we shall not be very anxious about the present world; we shall not seek great things for ourselves, nor be overwhelmed with the sorrows and troubles of life. Matt. iv 33, 44. Phil. iv. 6.

II. Consider the motives by which the exhortation is enforced.

1. The *superior nature of things above,* compared with the things that are on the earth. We know nothing of a future world but what is revealed to us in the Scriptures; it consists of what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man; but God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit. In general they are represented under the form of those things below which are most desirable; as a feast, a rest, a house, a city, a crown, a kingdom, and a state of glorious society, But in all respects they are infinitely superior to any thing we can conceive; more pure, more enlarged, more exalted and refined.

More particularly, consider the *great disparity* between these things and things on earth. (1) Things below are *created*, but those above are *uncreated.* God himself will be our light and glory, our portion, and exceeding great reward; the source of all our blessedness. (2) Things below are *marred by sin*, and are all defiled. Hence if we set our hearts upon them, we presently find ourselves deceived and disappointed. But the inheritance above is 'undefiled;' there is nothing to pollute our joys, for all things will be enjoyed in God. (3) Things below are *mixed with sorrow*, as well as marred by sin; but things above

are unmixed, and without alloy. Here the sweet in the cup is mixed with bitterness; we may think it is not so with others, though it is so with ourselves; but no situation, no circumstances are exempt from a portion of misery. (4) Things below are *given sparingly*, but things above with a liberal and bountiful hand. Psal. xvi. 11. There is no danger of forgetting God there, or of departing from him; there all his perfections are fully enjoyed. (5) Things below are of *short duration*, and soon vanish away; but the things that are not seen are eternal, and there is no danger of being disinherited.

2. Observe *the scene of all these joys:* "where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." It is highly endearing to be with the patriarchs, with the prophets; to be where our friends are. But oh, to be where Christ is, is the heaven of heaven.

Two things are particularly worthy of notice: one is, that Christ is in heaven above; and the other, that he is there exalted at the right hand of God. (1) It is an endearing thought that *Christ will be there.* It is good on earth to be where Christ is; this his disciples found, while he dwelt among them, and hence they lamented so deeply his departure. The presence of some particular friends is the life of the social circle in which they move; but the presence of the Saviour will fill heaven itself with unutterable joy and love. He will be the theme of the whole creation; his work, his death, his resurrection and ascension, will inspire every heart and every tongue with endless praise and adoration. The vision of the Lamb will banish from our minds every thing but his love: we also shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Rev. v. 13, 14. (2) Christ will be there *exalted at the right hand of God*, and this will give greater satisfaction still to those who love him. Oh to see him exalted who was once so deeply abased, and who for our sakes made himself of no reputation: this it is that will heighten the universal cry, 'Worthy is the Lamb!'

From this view we derive the most powerful motives to heavenly-mindedness, and setting our affection on things above.

How much also does this subject reprove our carnality, as utterly inconsistent with the prospects that are here presented!

THE GOSPEL TESTIMONY.

He that hath received his testimony, hath set to his seal that God is true.—John iii. 33.

These are the words of John the Baptist concerning Christ. The gospel is here called Christ's testimony, and faith in him is a receiving of his testimony.

I. Enquire why Christ's preaching is called a testimony.

1. A testimony is a declaration of ***what we have seen and known***, ver. 32—34. It consists in attesting the truth of any thing on sufficient evidence. Herein the gospel stands distinguished from the various systems of philosophy, which are little more than the conjectures of ingenious men, often contradictory, and seldom producing any beneficial result. But Christ speaks from knowledge, and with the most absolute certainty. He is the faithful and the true Witness, and the Amen.

2. A testimony supposes the things testified to be either *wholly unknown, or but little regarded*, by the party to whom the testimony is addressed. Where there is a competent knowledge of any subject, there is no need of any testimony. John ii. 25. But where the apprehended truth is disregarded, a testimony is designed to awaken the attention, and to enter a solemn protest against the opposite principle. Hence Paul testified to the Galatians, that if any among them were circumcised, Christ should profit them nothing. But the doctrines taught by our blessed Lord were chiefly matters of pure revelation, wholly unknown to the world before; or if partially understood by the prophets, were lightly regarded by the men of his generation. Christ's testimony therefore was designed to awaken general attention and regard.

3. A testimony is something addressed *to the consciences of men*, and is designed to be left there as a solemn and unequivocal appeal. If they receive it not, it will rise up in judgment against them another day. There is something also peculiarly solemn in the nature of a divine testimony; it is the God of truth himself attesting the veracity of his own word, and forming a decision from which there can be no appeal. John iii. 3. Rev. xxii. 18.

II. Consider the purport of our Lord's testimony.

In general it respected the glory of God the Father, which the only-begotten Son was appointed to 'declare.' And the life of Jesus was a constant practical testimony of the purity and excellence of his character and government. His testimony respected the guilty and ruined state of man, for he came to seek and to save that which was lost. John vii. 7. He testified of himself that he was the only-begotten Son of God, the only Saviour of sinners; and that he is himself the way, the truth, and the life. John v. 18. xiv. 6. He solemnly declared the necessity of repentance and faith, of our being born again, and becoming new creatures, in order to our entering into the kingdom of heaven. John iii. 3. That it is only by union with him that any man can bring forth fruit to God, John xv. 5; and that in the last day every one shall be judged according to his works. Matt. xxv. These things he knew and testified, though they were but little regarded by men in general. They were left upon the consciences of his hearers, and are left upon our consciences. Woe be unto us if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven. Heb. xii. 25.

III. Enquire what is meant by "receiving" Christ's testimony.

1. It is *fully to admit its import*. It is to see and feel that as sin-

ners we are justly condemned—that in us dwelleth no good thing—that our salvation must be all of grace—and that besides him there is no Saviour. Such is the import of the gospel testimony.

2. It is to receive it *as a testimony*, and not on any other consideration. He who receives so much of the gospel as he can derive from other sources, or establish by other evidence, and leaves the rest, receives none of the gospel as a testimony. If he did, he would embrace it all; faith in this testimony must be implicit, or it cannot be genuine.

3. It is to receive *the love of the truth*, as well as the truth itself. There is a conviction of the truth that is forced upon the mind by irresistible evidence, without any voluntary assent, and even against the prevailing inclination. Many of the Jews felt this, though they did not confess it, and all shall be made to feel it in the last day. John xii. 42. Rom. iii. 19. But cordially to embrace the testimony of Jesus, is to receive it as the hungry receive food, or the bread that cometh down from Heaven, and giveth life unto the world. John vi. 51. Till this is the case, and we are made to feel our perishing condition, there will be much in the gospel testimony which we shall neither receive nor understand. We shall be blind to the evil of sin, and to the glory of the Saviour. The things of God cannot be received in a speculative way; it is only by a sense of their moral fitness and excellence, that we can receive and enjoy them. 1 Cor. ii. 14.

IV. What is connected with a right reception of this testimony: "he hath set to his seal that God is true."

This implies that Christ's testimony is substantially the same as God's testimony, which had before been given in the language of prophecy, in the promises, in the types and shadows of the law; by a voice from Heaven on the banks of Jordan, and on the summit of Mount Tabor. He, therefore, who receives the one, will receive the other, and perceive the agreement between them; and he who rejects the one, does in effect reject the other also. Hence our Lord told the Jews, that had they believed the writings of Moses, they would also have believed his word, and have kept his sayings.

Moreover: by receiving the divine testimony we subscribe to the whole of the gospel, and bear witness to the truth. True believing is attended with an internal evidence, a moral consciousness and certainty, that the gospel is of God, and that the things testified are true. 1 John v. 10.

How dreadful then is the nature of unbelief, which practically denies the truth of the divine testimony, and makes God himself a liar.

How tremendous also must be the consequences of rejecting God's testimony, his last and final message to the world. It closes the door of mercy for ever, and leaves the sinner under irretrievable condemnation. John iii. 18, 36. Heb. ii. 3. x. 26—29.

LOVE TO GOD ESSENTIAL TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.—2 Thessalonians iii. 5.

Two epistles are addressed to the church at Thessalonica, without so much as a word of censure or complaint in either of them: on the contrary, they are full of commendation and encouragement. The Thessalonians were amiable christians.

In the structure of the text there is an evident allusion to the doctrine of the Trinity, each divine person being mentioned indirectly. This agrees with the apostolic manner of introducing doctrinal subjects for practical purposes, and not as a matter of mere speculation. In the same way the doctrine of the Trinity is expressed in the benedictions, at the commencement of most of the epistles.

I. Notice the blessings prayed for, namely, "love to God, and a patient waiting for Christ."

Love to God is a holy affection for the divine character, or to the name of the Lord. Its first operations in sinful men are repentance and faith. Afterwards, when believers are more fully established in the truth, there is a wider scope for it in the christian life; and in this way it was prayed for in the language of the text.

There are three things in particular, to which the love of God stands opposed,—

1. It is opposed to *the love of the present world*, for these are contrary to each other. The friendship of the world is enmity with God; and if any man love the present world, the love of the Father is not in him. If we love the world, it will have our thoughts and cares, our times and labour: but if we love God, he will have all, and be all to us.

2. The love of God is opposed to *the love of ourselves.* Supreme self-love is the characteristic of all the unregenerate. 2 Tim. iii. 2. A religion founded upon this principle has nothing virtuous in it, nor is God himself regarded any farther than his providence or grace is supposed to be subservient to the interest or convenience of the party. But all true love leads to self-denial, whether it be the love we bear to our fellow men or fellow christians. Like David's worthies, who hazarded their lives to fetch him water from the well of Bethlehem; and like Priscilla and Aquilla, who for Paul's sake were ready to lay down their own necks; we shall think no service too great, no sacrifice too expensive, for those we love. And where God or the Saviour become the object of regard, it is more so still: 'I am ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus,' said Paul to the elders of Ephesus. And how blessed would the state of religion be amongst us, if christians were all like-minded, and thus loved God and one another.

3. The love of God is equally opposed to *a state of lukewarmness,* like that of the Laodiceans. There are those who seem to love nothing,

and to have no heart at all for religion. Or if they have any religion, it is merely negative; they do no harm, and are not capable of doing any good. But true religion is utterly inconsistent with such a state of neutrality and indifference; its tendency is to warm the heart, and make us truly alive to God.

The next part of the apostle's prayer is, that we may be directed to "a patient waiting for Christ." This also is such a life as becomes a christian, who hopes to be delivered from the wrath to come. 1 Thess. i. 10. This state of mind implies (1) A firm belief in the second coming of the Lord. (2) A disengagedness from the world. (3) A calm submission to all the evils of the present state.

II. View the importance of the blessings prayed for, in reference to the whole of the christian life.

1. Love to God produces a state of mind that will keep every thing in *its proper place.* If he be loved supremely, he will be first sought, and every thing else will become subordinate. We shall also feel disposed to take all things well at his hand, without murmuring or repining.

2. Love to God is the most effectual *preservative from error.* All false systems of religion originate in the want of this principle, and are directly opposed to it. Hence arise diminutive thoughts of the evil of sin, and of human depravity; hence the implied abrogation of the moral law, and the extent of human obligation; and of course a denial of the necessity of atonement, of a divine Saviour, and of a divine Sanctifier. But if the love of God be shed abroad in the heart, there will be a dread of whatever tends to dishonour his holy name.

3. It is the spring of all *holy activity*, and the root of all the other graces. Hope and fear have an influence on the duties of the christian life, but it is the love of God that most powerfully inclines us to keep his commandments; and without it there is nothing virtuous in the obedience we render to his will.

4. Love will make us *happy and contented* in all our tribulations, and incline us to take all well that comes from the hand of God. Hence Eli could say, It is the Lord, let him do as seemeth him good. Job also in the deepest affliction could bless the name of the Lord, and Paul learned in whatsoever state he was, therewith to be content.

III. The necessity of having our hearts "directed" into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

1. Our hearts are *not naturally inclined* to the love of God, but the contrary. They are prone to take a wrong direction, and to be waiting and looking for other things, instead of waiting for the Saviour. There is but one right way, and it requires a guide to lead us into it, as it did at first to turn our feet into the way of peace. Luke i. 79.

2. It is *the Lord's work* to give a right direction to the mind, but is generally effected by the use of means. Chiefly by the ministry of the word, often by the books we read, by the connections we form, and the objects with which we converse. But these become effectual only through the agency of the Holy Spirit, whose office it is to kindle this sacred fire, and keep it burning upon the altar.

GOD THE STRENGTH OF HIS PEOPLE.

My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.—Psalm lxxiii. 26.

The psalmist affords us a very striking example of the great advan-ages derivable from the word and ordinances of God. He had been rying to read the book of providence, but found it inexplicable, and was empted to relinquish his religion. But being led to the sanctuary, all vas made plain. Still he was in great affliction, and his spirit failed im. This might be one reason of his former gloom and despondency, hough now we see him comparatively calm and happy.

I. Consider the evil to which we are subject in the present life. "My lesh and my heart faileth."

It may not be so with us at present, we may be full of health and igour; but the time will come when flesh and heart must fail.

By the "flesh" here is meant the material part of the human struc-ure; and by the "heart," that which is immaterial. Both these are iable to "fail," in times of deep affliction, and especially at the hour of leath.

1. There are times in which *our health and strength fail us.* n early life we feel vigorous and strong, capable of labour, and of en-gaging in all the active pursuits of life; but there is a time coming vhen all our energies will be relaxed. Some sink into an afflicted and enfeebled state at an early period, and are unfitted both for the duties and enjoyments of life. The sun shines upon them in vain; the sea-sons return, but not to them. Their flesh fail them, they pine away, and sink into the grave. Others who retain a strong constitu-ion for many years, will find it fail them at last; therefore let not the strong man glory in his strength. All flesh is grass, and all the goodli-ness thereof as the flower of the field. Some fatal disease may be growing up in the strongest constitution, that shall undermine it, and bring its possessor to the grave. Some are young and healthy, and scarcely think of death; yet in a little time all this glory may fade away. Others are in the midst of life, in the midst of its busy concerns, and full of schemes about futurity. But the eye will soon be dim, and the hands become feeble; the strong men will begin to bow themselves, and we shall soon go to our long home.

2. Not only the flesh but also *the heart will fail us.* The decline of bodily health and strength is generally attended with a great depression of the animal spirits. These, while continued, will diffuse a cheerfulness over the countenance, and bear us up under the troubles of life; but when health and strength fail, these generally go with them; and when the heart fails, it is far worse than the mere failure of health and strength. The heart is like the citadel; if that be taken there is but little hope. The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmity, but a

wounded spirit who can bear. In a time of sickness the heart, as well as the flesh, will fail us, as to the active pursuits and enjoyments of life; we shall then have no capacity, no relish for them; and it will be the same in old age. Or if affliction be long continued, our hearts will fail us, whether severe in their nature or not. As waters wear away the stones, so long continued adversity tends to destroy the hope of man.

II. The remedy provided against these evils. "But God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever."

Two important ideas are here suggested, to support the mind under the decays of nature, and the discouragement arising from present ills.

1. *What God will be to his people in this world*, even "the strength of their heart," while nature itself decays. The Lord has not promised to be the strength of our "flesh," though he often restores us in this respect, and our strength is renewed like the eagles. But he will be the strength of our "heart," and will strengthen us with might by his Spirit in the inner man. The grace that is in Christ Jesus, and the precious promises that are given us in him, are like a rock on which many have stood firm, even in the swellings of Jordan. These are the sure mercies of David, and the substance of that covenant in which he rejoiced on his dying bed. Fixed on this rock, multitudes of martyrs, and many individuals whom we have known, have encountered the sharpest trials, and triumphed over all their enemies.

2. What God will be to his people *in the world to come*, even their God and "their portion for ever." No words are sufficient to express what is comprehended in this promise. God in all he is, and in all that he has done, will be the portion of his people We feel a pity for our friends in affliction, and when they die, that they have no longer any portion under the sun; but they are going to possess a better inheritance than any they can leave behind. They depart and are with Jesus, which is far better. In this world we know a little of what it is to enjoy the favour of God, to love him, and to be loved by him; but these are only as drops compared to the fountain. In his presence is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures forevermore. Seasons of darkness are before us, and death is full in view; nothing can support us but the presence of God our Saviour.

THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH.

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.—1 John v. 13.

It is quite obvious that the apostle distinguishes between believing on the Son of God, and knowing that we have eternal life. Saving faith

therefore does not consist in knowing or being assured of our interest in Christ, though it may be accompanied with such an assurance. The latter is the fruit or effect of faith, and should not be confounded with it.

The apostle also makes a difference between our first trusting in Christ, and our subsequent believing on his name. The former refers to the period of our conversion, when we first came to him for salvation; the latter to a life of communion with him, and of dependence upon him.

I. Observe, that an interest in eternal life may be known by us in the present state.

A knowledge of interest in Christ does not appear to have been confined to a few eminent individuals, but was enjoyed in common by primitive believers. Their language was, 'I know in whom I have believed: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness: He loved me and gave himself for me: We know that we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens: Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.' Much of the same holy confidence was also enjoyed by old testament saints. David could say, 'Thou shalt redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for thou wilt receive me.' Job also could say, 'I know that my redeemer liveth.' Amidst all the troubles and sorrows which he endured, we do not find him oppressed with doubts and fears about his final state.

In what way then did saints of former times become possessed of this privilege, or how did they "know that they had eternal life?" In general, there are two kinds of knowledge; one arising from *consciousness*, and the other from *testimony*. Thus we know things which we see and feel, and things that we hear, or of which we read. Our knowledge of an interest in Christ is derived from both these sources; it is in part by faith, and in part by feeling. It is *by faith* we know that there *is* eternal life, and that God has connected it with believing, or that there is a connection between grace here and glory hereafter: and we could not have known this, if God had not revealed it to us in his word. But so far as relates to our being the *subjects* of that to which eternal life is promised, we know it only *by consciousness*, as the mind only can take cognizance of its own internal operations.

It seems a little extraordinary that christians should ever be in doubt of their being the subjects of gracious affections, and of an interest in eternal life. In all other cases we know what we believe, what we love, what we prefer, and from what we feel averse; and find no difficulty in ascertaining the state of our affections. But the reason of our darkness, doubt and hesitation, respecting our religious state, will be found in the imperfection of our spiritual affections, and the unhappy mixture of evil with the good. If we believe, we still have reason to mourn over much remaining unbelief; our love is mixed with much coldness and indifference, and our repentance with hardness of heart.

II. As it is possible for believers to know that they have eternal life, so it is very desirable that they should possess this satisfaction.

John wrote this epistle expressly for this purpose; and if not attained, there can be but little true enjoyment. It must be a painful state of suspense, not to know whether God be our enemy or our friend; whether we are travelling to the heavenly world, or going in the broad road that leadeth to destruction. Uncertainty in any similar case would be distressing. If we were on the journey, and did not know whither we were going; if we had an important cause depending, and were uncertain about the issue; we should be agitated with great anxiety, and made to feel the danger of our situation. How much more, in the great and overwhelming concerns of our souls.

On the contrary, where this delightful satisfaction possessed, it would shed a light upon our path, and sweeten all the enjoyments of life. To know that we have an interest in the great salvation, would make every holy duty an inestimable privilege, and be sufficient to support us in all our tribulation. Hence Paul could say, 'I am now ready to be offered up, and the time of my departure is at hand. Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' It is usual with God to hold out a crown of life, to stimulate and encourage us in all our labours; and of course, if that be out of sight, we shall go on heavily.

III. God is willing that we should enjoy the consolation of knowing that we have eternal life.

The mind of the apostle in the text is the mind of God, which is still more strongly expressed in Heb. vi. 18.

This willingness on God's part appears, in that he hath promised eternal life to the lowest degree of grace. Even the bruised reed shall not be broken, nor will he quench the smoking flax. All who are willing to be saved in God's way, by grace alone, through faith in the Redeemer, have the promise of salvation. Even such as have a desire after God, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, shall be filled. Receiving a disciple, because he belongs to Christ; giving a cup of cold water in his name, and not being offended in him; all these have the promise of an ample reward, and of eternal blessedness. These things are written, as the apostle says, for them that believe on the name of the Son of God, that they may know that they have eternal life.

IV. Consider what is necessary to our knowing that we have eternal life.

In general, this can be known only by our *sanctification;* by comparing the exercises and dispositions of our own minds, with the delineations of true religion in the sacred Scriptures. If we ask, how shall we know that we are born of God? The answer is, by believing in Christ for salvation; by loving God as our Father, and all his people as our brethren, ver. 1. How do we know that we really love the children of God, seeing we are connected with them by various other ties besides those of religion? By loving and keeping God's command-

ments, ver. 2, 3. How do we know that our faith is saving, and the effect of renewing grace? By its giving us the victory over the world, ver. 4, 5. But the sum of all is mentioned in the verse immediately preceding the text. 'He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.'

All this agrees with christian experience, and it is only in proportion as we are sanctified that we enjoy the full assurance of hope. Are not our evidences of grace darkened by sin? Is not the knowledge we have of our interest in the promise of eternal life, proportionably strong and clear, when holy and heavenly dispositions are most in exercise? Especially are we made to possess this blessed assurance, when most entirely devoted to the divine glory, and divested of all selfish motives in the service of God.

IMPORTANCE OF PREACHING CHRIST CRUCIFIED.

Before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you.—Galatians iii. 1.

Under any circumstances it is both sinful and unwise to turn away from the truth as it is in Jesus; it bespeaks us blind to our own interest, as well as regardless of the glory of God. But that which rendered such conduct inexcusable in the Galatians, was the degree of evidence with which the gospel was attended, and the abundance of evangelical preaching which they enjoyed. It had been the great object of the apostles' ministry to set forth Christ, and perhaps they had done this more especially to the Galatians; so that though they had never seen Christ in the flesh, yet with such advantages as they possessed, it was as if they had actually seen him.

I. Endeavour to ascertain the import of the terms employed in the text.

By "setting forth Christ crucified," is not meant a setting forth merely his bodily sufferings, or giving a tragical description of his agony in the garden or on the cross. The evangelists never attempt any thing of this kind in their narrative: on the contrary they state the circumstances with great brevity and simplicity, without any colouring or reflections of their own. The principal reason is, that however great the sufferings which our Lord endured, the virtue of atonement did not consist in the degree of suffering, but in the dignity of him that suffered. Such a representation may indeed affect the passions, but other views of the subject are more edifying and more useful.

1. Christ is set forth in the gospel as *the great propitiation, by which God's righteousness might appear in the remission of sins.* Rom. iii. 25. It was evident that God had pardoned the sins of old

testament believers, and taken them to Heaven, long before the true sacrifice was offered up; the righteousness of God's conduct was therefore in some degree implicated, and it was needful that it should be thoroughly cleared up. The gospel, by setting forth the death of Christ as an atonement for sin, makes a public declaration of God's righteousness, and shows at once how he can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

2. Christ is set forth as *the great expression of divine love to a sinful and perishing world.* Other proofs had been given of God's love and mercy, in his long-suffering and kindness towards men; but this is the greatest of all, and infinitely surpasses all the rest. John iii. 16. If God would give an expression of his love to sinners, it became him to do it in a manner suited to the unbounded goodnes of his nature; and herein he hath commended his love towards us. Rom. v. 8. 1 John iv. 9, 10.

3. Christ is set forth in the gospel as affording *the strongest proof of God's displeasure against sin.* The wrath of God had been revealed from heaven in various forms, against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; but the sufferings of Christ for us were the grand expression of God's infinite hatred of sin. In him sin was openly and publicly condemned, when he was made a curse for us. Rom. viii. 3. Gal. iii. 13.

4. Christ crucified is set forth as *the only foundation of a sinner's hope.* It is the tenor and import of the whole gospel, that there is salvation in no other. As the brazen serpent was exhibited to the Israelites for their healing, even so is a crucified Saviour exhibited to us as the only medium of life and salvation. Here it is that sinners must look, and from hence alone derive their hope of acceptance with God. John i. 29. iii. 14, 15.

5. The terms in the text further denote, *the high degree of evidence which attended the ministry of the apostles*, especially among the Galatians. Christ was "set forth" of old by promises, by types, and prophecies; but all this was dark and obscure. Sinners are now directed to behold the Lamb of God, and we all with open face behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord. There was a peculiar plainness in the preaching of the apostles, and Christ was "evidently" set forth, crucified among them. It was now shown that types and prophecies received their accomplishment in Jesus, and the fullest possible demonstration attended it. Hence those who hear the gospel are the more sinful and inexcusable, in not obeying the truth, and receiving it in love.

II. Consider the importance of setting forth Christ in the preaching of the gospel.

It was the substance of the apostolic ministry to exhibit a crucified Saviour. Paul would glory in nothing else, and determined to know nothing else; all their preaching was called, 'a preaching of Christ to the people.' It is also a principal part of the work of the Holy Spirit to take of the things of Christ, and show them unto us; it should

therefore be the great object of the christian ministry to co-operate with this design. Three important ends in particular are answered by it—

1. To exhibit Christ crucified *will tend to prove the hearts of men*, and make them manifest; and nothing besides has so direct a tendency to do it. If we have any real love to God, any love to righteousness, to the souls of men, or to our own souls, the doctrine of the cross will make it evident. We shall immediately feel and discover a peculiar relish for it, it will be to us as a savour of life unto life, and the name of Jesus will be as ointment poured forth. If destitute of love to God and man, and all virtuous affection, the doctrine of the cross will be to us a savour of death unto death. The preaching of Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but to them which are saved, Christ the wisdom of God, and the power of God. 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

2. To set forth Christ crucified is *the only way of giving peace to souls in distress for sin*. When a sinner is brought under the terrors of the law, made to see and realise his guilt and danger, and to feel his need of a Saviour, he is apt to look inward for some qualification to recommend him to Christ; but to set forth a crucified Saviour is to point him to the only refuge, and to show him at once his remedy. The penitent is often led to examine himself for evidences of grace in order to obtain comfort, and is as often disappointed, while the cross of Christ is overlooked. Let the sinner then direct his eyes to Jesus, and look to Calvary, for all his help must come from thence. Or if we desire a more spiritual and humble frame of mind, no means are so effectual to its production as the contemplation of a crucified Redeemer. If the doctrine of the cross will make us happy, we have great reason to be so: if it will not, there is no help for us in God.

3. To exhibit Christ crucified is the way to draw forth and *bring into exercise all the christian graces*. The doctrine of the cross furnishes fresh motives for repentance, gives a direct incentive to holy love, and lays again the foundation of our hope. If this doctrine were withheld, or only occasionally exhibited, it would becloud the whole of the christian system, and deprive it of the power of healing the broken in heart.

4. The preaching of Christ crucified is that which *leaves all unbelievers without excuse*. It will be impossible for those to plead ignorance of the way of salvation, "before whose eyes" this truth has been evidently set forth. If such should eventually perish, it will not be for lack of knowledge, but for want of a heart to attend to the things which belong to their everlasting peace.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO PURSUE THE CHRISTIAN RACE.

For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.—Hebrews xii. 3.

Knowing the difficulties which these Hebrew converts had to encounter, and the weakness of their faith, the apostle watches over them with the utmost solicitude, endeavouring to comfort and encourage them by the example of our blessed Lord, as he had done in a former instance: ch. iii. 1.

We may here observe—(1) That such things may befal us in our christian course, as to render us weary and faint in our minds. The cause itself is good, but there are many adversaries.—(2) To grow weary and faint in our minds, is a very dangerous symptom. It often leads to apostacy: many a one has first begun to tire, and then to turn back.—(3) It becomes us to watch carefully against it, and to arm our minds by the example of Christ.

I. Notice a few instances in which we are in danger of growing weary and faint in our christian course.

1. In reference to *a close and humble walk with God*, we are prone to draw back, and to grow weary. The happiest seasons in religion have not sufficient influence to keep us always near to God, and desirous of communion with him. After a diligent attention to the word, a more constant engagedness in holy duties, after some special instances of self-denial, a more affecting sense of our own depravity, and of the pardoning mercy of God, how prone we are to grow cold, to draw back, and to sink again into worldly-mindedness and carnality.

2. It is the same also with respect to *public duties.* Those who preach the word are in great danger of sinking into discouragement, if they labour without any visible success. Isaiah complained that so few believed his report, and both Jeremiah and Elijah were on the point of giving up their work. In hearing the word, if not edified and comforted, we are prone to grow weary and dull, and to think that our hearing is all in vain. In prayer, if the blessings we desire appear to be withheld, we are soon discouraged, though we ought always to pray, and not to faint. So difficult is it to walk by faith, and live by faith; to believe the promises, and to stay ourselves upon the Lord.

3. When *persecution or reproach* overtake us in our race, we are much in danger of turning back. It is easy to follow Christ when things go well, and the world is at peace with us: but if called to forego our temporal interest, to lose some of our friends, and those of our own house become our enemies, we shall be in danger of growing faint and weary in our course. When thus beset, some have been utterly discouraged, and have gone back again into the world.

4. When burdened and oppressed with *a weight of worldly cares,*

and brought into unexpected difficulties, the same danger attends us. In the early part of life, when free from burdens of this sort, we can go on our way rejoicing, and find the path without a thorn; but when filled with perplexing cares at a subsequent period, it is not quite so easy. Injuries and disappointments corrode the heart, unkindness and unfaithfulness exhaust our energies, and we move on slowly and heavily in the ways of God, faint and weary in our minds.

5. When struggling with *various temptations*, it is the same. If there were no enemy to annoy, if no lion in the way, no Canaanite in the land, and no snares laid for our feet, we could proceed with alacrity and delight. But when burdened with temptations from day to day, with a load of indwelling sin, and our opposition becomes feeble and inefficient, we are in great danger of growing weary, if not of turning back.

6. *Long continued affliction*, is likewise attended with great discouragement. Those who enjoy uninterrupted health do not know what others feel, who are under God's afflicting hand, and scarcely know what it is to be free from trouble. These things are apt to produce great discouragement, and even Job felt that they destroyed the hope of man: ch. xiv. 19.

7. When labouring under *a painful sense of guilt*, the mind is covered with gloom and darkness, and the heart is faint. While all is peace within and without, while the conscience is kept tender, and the heart is right with God, it is easy to go forward: but when burdened with a sense of our many backslidings, and great unprofitableness, we are in danger of growing faint and weary, and of slackening in our course.

II. Consider the example of Christ as exhibited for our encouragement.

1. *What he had to endure* in his race, even "the contradiction of sinners against himself." He was not only contradicted in words, but in actions. The whole of his doctrine, work, and conduct met with continual opposition; he was tempted in all points, and tried every way. He was laughed at by Herod, tempted by the devil, reviled by the Jews, smitten by the rabble, scourged by Pilate, and put to death. Whatever opposition or difficulty we may meet with, it is nothing when compared with his; he met with "such contradictions," as no one besides ever did.

2. Consider *who it was* that endured all this, and *from whom* he endured it. He was not only good and kind, as men may be; he was 'holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, made higher than the heavens;' the Son of God, the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person. It is no wonder if we who are sinful, and were sometime foolish and disobedient, should meet with such treatment; but that he should be subject to obloquy and contempt, is wonderful indeed. Affecting is the thought, that one of such infinite dignity, wisdom, and purity should be contradicted, blasphemed, and persecuted; and all this by "sinners," by sinners whom he came to save!

3. *The manner* in which he bore all this: he "endured" it. He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, he hid not his face from shame and spitting. He endeavoured to bring sinners to the knowledge of the truth, and amidst all their hard sayings he expostulated with the utmost forbearance. He never gave up his course of holy obedience and meek submission, till he had finished it with joy.

4. Consider *for whom he endured it.* For our sakes, and for ours only; it was in love to our souls that he suffered himself to be reviled, and evilly entreated. What a motive to endure for his sake, whatever opposition we may meet with, and why we should not be weary nor faint in our minds.

Let us learn from hence the necessity of keeping Christ's example in view, and of studying his character, in order to our perseverance in the ways of God.

Let those who contradict and blaspheme beware of the consequences, for they will soon have to give an account of all the hard speeches, which they have spoken against him. Jude. 15.

THE CHRISTIAN CONFLICT.

Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.—Hebrews xii. 4.

The apostle had represented these Hebrews as running in a race, and for their encouragement set before them the example of Christ. He now considers them as engaged in a warfare; and lest they should be faint and weary, he reminds them that they had not endured so much as some that went before, and especially as Christ himself. Though they had suffered much, yet they must be willing rather to die than be overcome, or be tempted to renounce the Saviour. The Christian life is a perpetual strife; he that would walk with God here, and enjoy him hereafter, must engage in a warfare to the end of life.

I. View the conflict in which christians are engaged, "striving against sin."

We have no contention with the persons of men, nor do we wish to interrupt the peace of society: if our religion renders us litigious and contentious, it is no part of the religion of Christ, for that teaches us to be gentle towards all men. Our contention is not with them, but with their principles, with the errors and vices of mankind.

Sin in particular, in all its forms, and under all its appearances, is to be the object of our supreme aversion. Sin is here considered as the aggressor, as making war against the soul. Like an invading foe it has entered the world, and threatens its destruction. Multitudes have been carried by it to the gulph of perdition, and have sunk to rise no more.

Satan is indeed a powerful adversary, but it is only by means of sin that he has influence over us; our opposition therefore is not so much to him, as to the principle on which he acts. Some are content to make a great outcry against Satan, and to lay a great deal of blame on him, while they are not equally concerned to take blame to themselves, and to "strive against sin."

Let us notice how this conflict is carried on—

1. Resistance to sin, to become effectual, must be *decisive and resolute.* Sin meets with some opposition from unconverted men, and there is great danger of mistaking this for the christian conflict. They do not directly fall in with every temptation, nor commit all the evil in their power; but the opposition is very feeble. They oppose sin only as sin is in some cases opposed to them, to their inclination or their interest, or as it affects character and consequences. The heart is never engaged in the contest; and notwithstanding all their resistance, sin and they are in cordial friendship, and therefore no wonder they are overcome. Our resistance must be resolute, and not feigned. A little faint opposition now and then from conscience only will do no good, it must be a holy determination to overcome in the strength of the Lord. If only a few scattered forces be opposed to an invading foe, a country would be undone; if the resistance is to be effectual, the nation must collect all its strength, make a decisive stand, and follow up every advantage with courage and resolution. Our opposition to sin must be the same, "resisting" and "striving" against it to the last extremity, without any regard to consequences.

2. The resistance must be *universal and unreserved.* So long as any evil is unopposed, the contest is all in vain. Our opposition to every other evil will soon come to nothing, if there be any one which we do not endeavour to mortify and overcome. Saul did much towards exterminating the Amalekites; but so long as Agag was spared, he might as well have done nothing, for the Lord would not regard him. Striving against all sin, as such, is the only way to be preserved from any sin. Particular regard also must be had to that evil which most easily besets us, and gains the ascendency over us, for it is this which strengthens all the rest.

3. It must be *constant and persevering.* So long as this enemy is alive in us, we must not suspend our operations. Not a prayer or two will do, not a spirit of watchfulness and self-denial for a week or two; it must be the work of our whole lives, for sin will not die till we die. There must be no truce, no cessation of hostilities; we must not give place to the adversary for a moment. It is not sufficient to appear eager in this contest at the first, or for a time only: many who escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour, have again been entangled and overcome. But if we have suffered a defeat we must not despair, but rise again and renew the contest.

4. It must be *carried on to the last extremity*, "resisting unto blood, striving against sin." Sin in general makes its attack by allurement and seduction, addressing itself to our passions and interest, and the prevailing corruptions of the heart; but its operations vary with our circumstances and condition. Sometimes the mind is distressed by sud-

den and violent suggestions, full of impiety and blasphemy; at others, with the apprehension of some evil, that might be followed with ruin and disgrace. Many that lived in times of persecution were tempted to deny Christ and his cause, and those who endure reproach for his sake are tempted to fear and shame. But in whatever way sin strives against us, we must resist it, even at the expense of life itself.

5. This conflict must be begun and carried on *in the strength of the Lord.* The most arduous exertions will be ineffectual, if undertaken in our own strength. In order that our weapons may be successful, they must become mighty through God. It is through the Spirit only that we can mortify the deeds of the body, and by the blood of the Lamb that we can overcome. If we be conquerors, it must be through him that hath loved us. It will not do to rely on our own strength, on any of our resolutions, or on any means that we can employ. Self-confidence occasioned Peter's fall. We must deal much with God in prayer, must hide his truth in our hearts, and take heed unto our ways according to his word. We shall succeed in this warfare, if we be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might; but in no other way.

II. Consider some of the motives to encourage us in this conflict.

1. *The cause* in which we are engaged *is a good one*, the cause of truth and righteousness. It is the same cause as that in which Christ himself engaged, for he came to destroy the works of the devil.

2. Consider who is *the leader and commander* in this warfare. He knows all the wiles of the enemy, all our weakness and danger, and will not leave us unprotected. He has proved the utmost strength of temptation, and has overcome; we have only to pursue and follow up the victory.

3. Whenever opposed by sin, let us consider it as a glorious opportunity of *showing our love to God*, by our self-denial, and entire devotedness to him. In this view we may 'count it all joy, when we fall into divers temptations.'

4. Seeing we have not been exposed to those severer trials, referred to in the text, let us *quit ourselves like men*, and like men of God. If we have run with the footmen, and they have wearied us, how should we be able to contend with horses. Jer. xii. 5.

5. The contest itself is of *infinite importance*. If that be lost, all is lost. Such will be the case with those who never strive, and with those who strive in vain. But when the battle is won, the victory will be glorious.

6. The contest is of *short duration*, and will soon be over. A few more struggles and groans, a few more prayers and tears, and it shall be with our enemies as it was with the enemies of Israel; we shall see their face no more. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

SLOW ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE PROMISES.

The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie. Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.—Habakkuk ii. 3.

The prophet here appears in the character of a watchman upon the walls of the city, looking and waiting for an answer from heaven, respecting the enemies of Israel. God had already said, ch. i. 7, that he would raise up the Chaldeans, who should march through the land. The prophet then enquires, whether there was to be no end to their rapacity, ver. 17; and waits to hear what God will answer.

He expected to be 'reproved,' or argued with, by the people, who found it very difficult to reconcile present appearances with divine prediction, while the prophet himself was not a little perplexed upon the subject. The Lord therefore deigns to answer him by a 'vision,' which fortels the fall of the Chaldean empire. He is ordered to 'write' it, because the time was not yet, and to encourage him to wait with patience.

These things, though addressed to the church at a particular time, are nevertheless of common use. Let us therefore proceed to notice,

I. The truth of what is here supposed, namely, that the promises of God are generally known to tarry long, before they are fully accomplished.

1. The *earliest and the greatest of all the promises*, that of the Messiah, which included all the rest, was remarkable for this. Eve probably expected to see the promise fulfilled, but if she did it was a great mistake. Little more is said of the Woman's Seed till the time of *Noah*, which was about sixteen hundred years afterwards, and then the world was drowned. Besides, the promise was but obscurely hinted at in Noah's prophecy, when he blessed 'the Lord God of Shem.' After this we hear no more of the promise for four hundred and fifty years, when it was renewed to *Abraham*, 'In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' Still there is no appearance of its fulfilment. Upwards of eight hundred years more roll on, and then it is renewed to *David*, to whom additional revelations were made upon the subject; but still there is no appearance of the thing itself. From thence Christ became the enraptured theme of prophecy, and to him gave all the prophets witness; yet after this Israel is led away captive, and even Judah, in whom the promise was to be fulfiled. Six or seven hundred years more pass over, and at last the Messiah appears in a way that was not expected.

2. If we descend to *particular promises*, included in this great and leading article, we shall find the same plan pursued; and all along the vision has seemed to tarry until its final accomplishment. It

was promised to *Abraham* that he should have a son. Eleven years pass, and no son is given, but the promise is again renewed, till at length Abraham was tempted to say, What wilt thou give me? Abraham however believed the promise, and it was counted to him for righteousness; but it is not until long after this that a son is given. In the course of about sixty years more, *Isaac* had a family; Jacob and Esau were born. Esau had children, but the promises are not to him; and it was eighty years after this, that Jacob had any children. See how the vision tarries, and how slowly the promise is accomplished. When *Jacob* had a family, here is Joseph sold into Egypt, and a cloud overspreads all his prospects. Jacob's descendants are detained as slaves in Egypt upwards of two hundred years; and when brought out, they must wander in the wilderness for forty years, before the land of Canaan is given them, though it had been promised so long before. Jacob also had a particular promise, that the Lord would be with him, and would 'surely do him good;' and truly he was preserved, and had a large family in his old age, but he had little comfort in them. There was only one that seemed to fear God, and on him his heart was set: but lo, he is taken away, and his hope is perished from the Lord. The bloody garment was to him a sign, that he should go with sorrow to the grave. The famine that prevailed in the land, the mysterious detention of Simeon in Egypt, and the demand for Benjamin to go down, were sufficient to overwhelm his faith. But at last the promise is fulfilled, though it involved such a number of subordinate events, and required so long a time for its accomplishment. The *calling of the gentiles* had been promised from the days of Noah, when it was foretold that God would persuade Japheth to dwell in the tents of Shem, and later prophets spoke more fully and more plainly upon the subject. And yet for many centuries this promise was delayed, until its accomplishment was no longer expected, and there required a fresh revelation to explain and to confirm the promise. Acts xi. 4. Ephes. iii. 5, 7.

The coming of *the latter-day glory*, is also matter of very frequent promise. Jesus is to reign from sea to sea, and from the rivers to the ends of the earth. All nations are to call him blessed, and of his government and peace there shall be no end. And yet nearly two thousand years have passed away, and the greater part of the world is still covered with heathenism, and the grossest superstition. The Jews still remain in unbelief, and the great body of professing christians are little better than infidels. The *second coming of Christ* was said to be very 'quickly,' and the judge to be standing at the door; and yet ages roll on, without any appearance of such an event. The *general promises of the gospel*, made to believers, are much the same. Those who seek the Lord, do not always find the promised blessing immediately. God has also engaged to answer prayer, yet he does it not as we expect, but in his own way. Some have laboured long under doubts and darkness, and others have sunk into deep distress. All things, it is promised, shall work together for good to them that love God; but it is not always seen to be so, and it is generally long before such a result is produced.

II. Observe the wisdom of God in thus suffering the vision to tarry, and his promise to be fulfilled by slow degrees.

1. It is fit that *he should judge of the time* for bringing his purposes to pass. He is infinitely wise, and views things in all their relations; it is fit therefore that the times and seasons should be in his own power. The coming of Christ, though delayed for four thousand years after the giving of the first promise, was nevertheless in 'the fulness of time,' and at the fittest season.

2. The fulfilment of the promises is *not the less certain*, on account of the seeming delay. "It will surely come, and will not tarry," beyond the appointed time. God is not slack, as some men count slackness; the thing is not gone by, but the time is not arrived.

3. It agrees with the character of *a great and wise Being*, that his designs should be so comprehensive as to require time to bring them to pass. We form little plans like ourselves, some longer than others; and those that require the greatest length of time for their maturity, are generally of the greatest magnitude. The building of a palace or a city, is a work that could not be effected in a day.

4. This system is peculiarly adapted *to try mankind*, both good and bad. Unbelievers will be like Jehoram, who said, Why should we wait for the Lord any longer. Or like the wicked and slothful servant, My Lord delayeth his coming; or the scoffers in the last day, who ask, Where is the promise of his coming. Good men will find occasion for the exercise of faith, like Abraham in offering up his son; in hope, believing against hope, and against present appearances. Thus under the long and dark reign of antichrist, while the suffering church is looking and waiting for deliverance, it shall be said, Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

IMPROVEMENT.

There are many promises which we expect to see fulfilled: some to the church of God, and some to individual believers; let us therefore guard against the following things—

(1) Beware of *unbelief.* This is a sin that easily besets us; but let us not indulge impatience, nor say in our hearts, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.

(2) Beware we do not lose sight of the *promises*. We may not totally disbelieve them, and yet live as though we did, and as though we did not expect their fulfilment. This is a species of practical unbelief, not corresponding with an unshaken trust and confidence in God.

(3) Beware of *impatience*, while the promise is suspended. Let patience have its perfect work, and let faith be content to wait the Lord's time; for they shall not be ashamed that wait for him.

MAN THE OBJECT OF DIVINE REGARD.

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him; and the son of man, that thou visitest him?—Psalm viii. 3, 4.

This psalm appears to have been composed in the evening of the day, when the writer was viewing the starry heavens, and this may be the reason why no mention was made of the orb of day. Its object is to celebrate the glory of God as the Creator of all things. The idolatrous world were worshipping these heavens, but David views them all as God's own, and draws from hence a conclusion, that his condescending goodness to man is unspeakable.

I. Consider the fact, that God is "mindful of man," and "visits him."

The former of these expressions denotes the love he bears to man, and the latter the manifestation of that love.

1. If we consider man in his *primitive state*, the divine regard towards him is sufficiently evident, particularly in three instances—(1) In subjecting to his authority the whole of the lower creation, and rendering the higher parts of creation subservient to his interest, ver. 6—8.—(2) In the sacred communion to which he was admitted by his Creator, in the cool of the day. Gen. iii. 8. This was being "mindful" of him, and "visiting" him.—(3) The earth itself is represented as an object of eternal joy for man's sake, and as the place of his intended residence. Prov. viii. 29—31. In creating the whole of the visible universe, man is the immediate object of his regard, and probably creation itself would have had no existence but for him.

2. If we consider man in his *fallen state*, the expressions of divine regard are no less wonderful. Yea, God has if possible been more "mindful" of man since the fall than before, and has "visited" him with still greater mercy; though certainly, not on that account. His infinite regards are seen—(1) In *the gift of his Son*, who became incarnate, suffered in our stead, and died for our sins. His assuming our nature, and taking it into union with his own, conferred a higher dignity on man than any other event since the beginning of the world. In the person of Christ the dominion of the manhood extends over the whole creation, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or principalities, or powers. Col. i. 16—18. Heb. ii. 6—9. Here indeed God may be said to have "visited" us, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. And in giving his Son to die for us, he has afforded an overwhelming proof of his regard: herein indeed is love. 1 John iv. 10.—(2) Another evidence of it is, his *sending us the gospel*. God was mindful of Abraham's posterity, and almost confined his visits to them; but of late he has also visited the gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

Acts xv. 14. Of this distinguishing mercy we have enjoyed a large share, accompanied with invitations and promises.—(3) In *the gift of his Holy Spirit*, he has shown the greatness of his regard. God has not only visited us, but in this way taken up his abode, and dwelt with man upon the earth. Yea, he overlooks heaven and earth, to visit and take up his abode with the humble and the contrite. Isai. lxvi. 1, 2.—(4) The *gift of eternal life* to all that believe in Jesus, is another strong expression of his kind regards to man. John iii. 16.

II. Observe the condescending kindness of the Lord in all this.

The devout psalmist is deeply affected with it, and humbly exclaims, Lord, what is man, that Thou art mindful of him!

1. If we consider the infinite *dignity and glory of God*, we may be astonished that he should be mindful of us. The heavens, with all their starry hosts, are only the work of his "fingers:" what then must be his outstretched arm! These are not the displays, but rather 'the hidings of his power.' Hab. iii. 4—11.

2. His condescension will appear, if we consider the *insignificance and frailty of man*, made of the dust of the ground, and returning to his original nothingness. It is not common for those of the human species to be mindful of worms and insects, or to bear them any regard; yet the Lord thinketh upon us. Isai. xl. 15—17.

3. *The sinfulness of man*, as well as his original meanness, makes the lovingkindness of God still more wonderful. Man is now degraded from his original dignity, even below the brute creation; yea, he has debased himself even unto hell. Isai. i. 3. lvii. 9.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) If God be thus mindful of man, it is fit that we should be mindful of Him in return. How provoking is ingratitude, and the want of love, amidst such a profusion of mercies, and such unspeakable condescension.

(2) If God visits us, it is important for us to know the time of our visitation, whether as individuals or in a social capacity; or it will lead to the most awful consequences. Luke xix. 42—44.

CERTAIN SUCCESS OF CHRIST'S UNDERTAKING.

And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.—Isaiah liii. 10.

In no part of the prophetic writings are the humiliation and sufferings of Christ detailed with such affecting minuteness as in this chapter, and inveterate indeed must have been the blindness and unbelief of the Jews,

not to perceive and admit the force of such overwhelming evidence. The same prophecy however foretold that the report would not be believed, and that when the Saviour should appear he would be rejected and despised of men. Nevertheless he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

I. Offer a few explanatory remarks on the terms of the text.

1. By "the pleasure of the Lord" we are to understand, *his purposes concerning the cause of Christ.* It was an important part of his good pleasure, that sinners should be redeemed by the blood of Christ, and this he delighted to accomplish. Psal. xl. 6—8. But this part of the will of God is supposed in the text to be already effected, and that another part is immediately to follow, relating to the progress of Christ's kingdom.

2. The success of Christ's undertaking, in the universal spread of the gospel, is called *the pleasure of the Lord*, because it is an object of his eternal purpose, and the end he had in view in the creation of the world. Col. i. 16. It is true indeed, the accomplishment of God's design is said to be his pleasure, even when it relates to the punishment of his enemies; for 'he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans;' but that in which he takes peculiar delight is the enlargement of Christ's kingdom. God takes pleasure in all his works, but more in the work of redemption than any other, and more still in rewarding the obedience and sufferings of his well-beloved Son, than in putting him to grief. John x. 17. Phil. ii. 9.

3. The great work of subduing the world is here placed *in the hand of Christ.* The work of redeeming sinners was committed to him, and he succeeded in that; and now the work of subduing the nations to the obedience of faith, is put into his hand. He is head over all things to the church, and all shall be made subservient to his will. All power in heaven and earth is given unto him, and he is sending forth his armies, that he may rule in the midst of his enemies, and triumph over all the earth. Psal. xlv. 3, 4. cx. 1—3.

4. It is here foretold that the work of Christ *shall certainly succeed*, and the pleasure of the Lord "shall prosper in his hand." If placed in other hands it would have failed, but with him it must prosper. Adam was constituted the federal head of his posterity, but he failed in the undertaking, and all were ruined. Moses was charged with the redemption of Israel, but he failed of bringing them into the promised land; and as to the eternal salvation of any of them, it was effected only by the death of Christ, and not by the law of Moses. All others have failed and been discouraged, but he shall set judgment in the earth, and the isles shall wait for his law. Thousands among the Jews, and tens of thousands among the gentiles, have submitted to his authority; and he shall still go on and prosper, till the whole earth be filled with his glory.

II. Consider the reasons why the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in the hand of Christ.

Two things are generally necessary to the success of any great undertaking; one is, personal fitness or qualification, and the other, the means of accomplishing the design.

1. Christ possesses, in an eminent degree, *the qualifications* necessary to the work he has undertaken. Great and unconquerable zeal is required, where the work is arduous and attended with great difficulty, and nothing can be done without it. If a man, from mere worldly motives, engages in the work of the ministry, he will not be likely to succeed; his efforts and his zeal are totally inadequate to so important an undertaking. But Christ's heart was wholly set upon what he undertook, and his zeal shall bring it to pass. Isai. lxiii. 4. Wisdom also is required. A good intention, accompanied with ardent exertions, is not sufficient; wisdom and understanding are necessary to conduct things to a proper issue; and these qualifications are possessed in an eminent degree by the blessed Saviour. Isai. iii, 13. Faithfulness also to his engagements was eminently verified in him. Isai. xi. 5. Heb. iii. 2.

2. Christ possesses *all the necessary means* for carrying on his own cause in the world. In consequence of his death the Holy Spirit is given, to convince the world of sin, and to give success to a preached gospel. Christ is able also to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him, and that in consequence of his intercession before the throne. He can keep us from falling, and present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. All the arrangements of providence are in his hands; the fate of kingdoms and of empires, and whatever is necessary to the prosperity of his own most righteous cause, are entirely at his command.

Let us reflect, (1) That as God has entrusted his own glory in the hands of Christ, it becomes us to commit our all to him, that he may save us in the great day. (2) That those who labour with Christ in his cause have reason to take encouragement, for it is in his hands, and must finally prevail.

GOD THE REFUGE OF HIS SAINTS.

The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.—Proverbs xviii. 10.

Names were originally given to express character, as well as to distinguish one individual from another; and as human beings are rarely known to excel in more than one attribute, one name is generally found to be sufficient. But as the Supreme Being is possessed of every possible excellence, various names are required to express his character, and the regard he bears towards his people.

By "the name of the Lord" in the text is not meant any one particular excellence, in distinction from another, but his whole character, by

which he has made himself known to us. To man in innocence he was known as the Creator; to man since the fall as a Redeemer through Christ Jesus; and it is under this latter character that his name is presented to us in the text. Thus also his glorious name was proclaimed to Moses. Exod. xxxiv. 5—7.

The name of the Lord is said to be "a strong tower." In a time of danger, on the defeat of an army, or the invasion of a country, persons are driven hither and thither to seek for safety; and in allusion to this, the name of the Lord is set before us as a refuge. It is sometimes compared to a high tower, out of the reach of enemies; and here to a strong tower, bidding defiance to every assault.

That we may enter into the subject with some advantage, let us take a brief review of some of those circumstances in which we stand in need of a refuge.

I. Can we not remember our situation when first awakened to see and realise our exposedness to the wrath of God, and how welcome the name of the Lord then was to us.

All men are exposed to the wrath of God as sinners, and are under the curse; but all do not believe or consider their danger; and so when that wrath shall come, like the inhabitants of the old world or of Sodom, they will be running hither and thither for safety, and will find no place of refuge. Oh then to have an ark, a little Zoar to flee to!

Some who are awakened to a sense of danger, have fled to some *false refuge* that will not defend them, and have there reposed their confidence, and will probably continue to do so, till the overflowing scourge shall pass over and sweep it away. These false refuges are, some stirring of religious feeling, some alarm of conscience, some sorrow for sin, accompanied with hopes and promises of future amendment. A sinner, in such circumstances, is exposed to great danger, and likely to rest in something short of Christ.

Even those who have been truly brought to repentance, "the righteous" themselves, have been known to run for a time to some false refuge. Christ is the last resort of a perishing sinner, though he only can deliver us from the wrath to come. Can we not remember when we had no help in ourselves, and no hope; when as guilty, ruined and undone, we had no refuge but the mere mercy of God, revealed to us through a Mediator? This was the refuge of the publican, of the three thousand under Peter's sermon, of the Philippian jailor, and of every one that is brought to true repentance.

II. There are circumstances in life, in which persons are reduced to the utmost extremity, and at such a season the name of the Lord is a refuge to his people.

Nations are subject to wars and tumults, and great calamities; and at such times how precious is the name of the Lord to the righteous that are among them. Instances of this are recorded in the history of Asa and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, when the Ethiopians and the Assyrians

invaded the land, and even when they were ready to be swallowed up of their enemies. 2 Chron. xiv. 11. xx. 12. How great the difference also between Jeremiah the prophet who had a refuge to flee to, and king Zedekiah who had none, in the day of Judah's calamity. The one was calm and tranquil, amidst the horrors of the siege, the other was utterly consumed with terrors. Jer. xvii. 17. xl. 1—6. lii. 8—11.

In *private calamities*, as well as in those of a more public nature, persons are often reduced to great extremity. We are liable to heavy losses and disappointments, to sickness, poverty, and distress. Under all these, various refuges have been devised; some have sought to drown their sorrows in worldly pleasure, others in worldly pursuits; some have sunk into despair, and others have committed suicide. But the righteous have made the name of the Lord their refuge and their hiding-place; they have confided in the truth and faithfulness of God, and found comfort and support. They may be troubled on every side, yet not distressed; cast down, but not destroyed.

III. There are seasons when our souls are brought into darkness and distress, under a sense of fresh-contracted guilt, and when we can find no refuge upon earth; yet even then is the name of the Lord a strong tower, to which we may flee and be safe.

Saul and David both sinned; the one had a refuge, the other none; and we know the consequence. Both of them had great troubles, but they were not alike supported under them. Balaam and Jonah were both disobedient; the one sunk into despair, the other would look again towards the holy temple. Judas and Peter both sinned against the Lord; the one went out and hanged himself, the other went out and wept bitterly. Such is the difference in having or not having a refuge, amidst the terrors of a guilty conscience. And what an unspeakable mercy to be permitted to take refuge in God when we have sinned against him, and when there is no rest or peace to be found for our souls any where else!

IV. There is a period approaching when we must all be driven from our present abode, and shall need a place of refuge, even at the solemn hour of death.

When death comes at unawares, what distress attends it! The affrighted soul of a sinner on a dying bed is pursued by the last enemy through every lane of life; he now finds that he must be taken, must go, and enter into a world unknown. Oh then for the eternal God to be our refuge, and to find underneath us the everlasting arms!

V. There is a period coming when the world shall all be in alarm, and we shall need a refuge from the devouring fire.

The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the arch-angel, which shall shake the caverns of the dead; and when the heavens shall begin to pass away with a great noise, and

the elements to melt with fervent heat; what terror and consternation will be spread abroad. What multitudes will be calling upon the rocks and mountains to hide them from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. Oh then to find the name of the Lord to be a strong tower, to which the righteous may run and be safe!

SUPERIOR IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENTS.

I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down.—Nehemiah vi. 3.

Nehemiah was truly engaged in a great work, and was chiefly employed in effecting the reformation of Israel, after their return from Babylon. Such also was his magnanimity, that he could not be content to live in a court, while Jerusalem lay waste. He comes to the holy city with the returning captives, and begins to rebuild its walls with all his might. The greatness of the work however did not consist merely in rebuilding the walls, but in the important ends to be answered by it; it was the city of the living God, and the seat of public worship. Yet no sooner had he commenced the undertaking, than he meets with opposition. Some of the neighbouring heathen tried to put him in fear; they also allured him, in the hope of diverting him from his purpose; but to all these he answered as in the text.

The conduct of Nehemiah on this occasion is worthy of example, and in this view we may apply it to ourselves.

I. Consider the christian as engaged in a great and arduous work.

Though it is not in every respect like that of Nehemiah, it bears some relation to it. There are many great undertakings in the world, and many works of art which men call great; but they dwindle into insignificance, when compared with the work in which christians are engaged. The cause of God in the world is of unspeakable importance, and the soul of man is of more consequence than the whole material creation.

More particularly—

1. Every christian is represented *as engaged in a race*, as running for an immortal prize, and this is an arduous undertaking. It is no great thing indeed to enter upon the race; many do that who never win the prize. It is easy to set out in the ways of God, and to go on till we meet with some difficulty or some temptation: but it is a great matter 'so to run as to obtain,' and to 'endure to the end.' This requires no ordinary degree of zeal and fidelity. 1 Cor. ix. 24—27.

2. Christians are engaged in *an arduous contest with all the powers of darkness*, and wrestle not merely with flesh and blood. It requires but little courage to begin the contest; many do that who are overcome at last. Many put on the harness who do not put it off with

honour, and endure for a time only, till overcome by some great temptation. But to fight the good fight of faith, and to lay hold on eternal life, is indeed an arduous enterprize. Here no success can be expected, unless we are made strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Oh to be faithful unto death, to finish our course with joy, and to be more than conquerors through him that loved us! Ephes. vi. 10—13.

3. They are *engaged in the work of saving others,* as well as in seeking their own salvation. Real christians do not wish to go to heaven alone; seeking the good of others is of the essence of true religion. No man is converted for his own sake, but that he may bring others to the knowledge of the truth; and when the Lord blesses his people, it is that they may become a blessing. Luke viii. 39. And what are all the works of men, compared with the salvation of an immortal soul, and seeking the everlasting welfare of those about us?

4. The proper employment of a christian is *the spread of the gospel,* and carrying on the cause of God in the world. This is the work in which the prophets and apostles were engaged, in which Christ himself was engaged, and for the accomplishment of which the whole system of providence is directed. The work committed to Moses and Aaron was but a faint emblem of this, and the work in which Nehemiah and Ezra were engaged was all preparatory to it. The labours of the apostles and early christians were all employed in laying the foundation; it is for us to raise the superstructure, and to bring forth the topstone with shoutings, Grace, grace unto it.

II. The work in which we are engaged is sure to meet with opposition, and it becomes us not to be diverted from it, but to say with Nehemiah, "I am doing a great work, and cannot come down."

God's work must be first and chiefly regarded, it must be our supreme end, and all others subordinated to it. Many are convinced that the concerns of the soul are of the greatest importance; they know that they must be converted, must be born again, must be brought to repentance, or perish everlastingly; and they fully intend to seek the Lord, but at present it is not convenient, for something hinders. Thus it is with many a thoughtless youth, who sees and feels his danger; and with many a busy tradesman, who would attend to the concerns of his soul, but urgent worldly calls prevent. Thus alas it is too frequently with the real christian, when tempted to the neglect of duty. But how much better is the answer of Nehemiah to all such impediments: I am doing a great work, and cannot come down.

1. In particular, *christians are engaged in seeking the Lord,* in waiting upon him in secret; and when they would draw near at the appointed season, something in the family, or in a way of business intervenes, and the work of God is suspended. But all these things should be regarded as an effort of the enemy to draw us aside from the path of duty, and cause the work of God to cease. Let us rather say with Abraham, 'Tarry ye here, while I go up yonder to worship;' or answer like Nehemiah in the text.

3. Christians are employed *in relieving the distressed,* and in con-

tributing to the support of the cause of God: but when they think of doing these things, some temptation is apt to present itself in order to prevent. We can do but little good without some self-denial, and if not prepared for this, the work of God must cease.

3. While engaged in doing good, *we are exposed to injuries from men*, as Ezra and Nehemiah were. There will always be some Tobiah or Sanballet, who will seek to hinder the work of God, but it behoves us to regard them not. When Whitfield was persecuted and abused for preaching in a seaport town, previous to his departure for Georgia, he was advised by his friends to stop and prosecute the offenders; but he replied that he had no time for such an undertaking, he must be about his Master's business.

4. The *enjoyments of life* too often call off our attention, or unfit us for religious duties. Of these we must beware; and if truly engaged for God, we shall have no time to lose in mere worldly amusements, but shall find enough in religion to engage all our time and all our thoughts. The work of God is great and large, and demands all our energies, and all our strength.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) Let chistians be careful to guard against a light and trifling spirit, as totally incompatible with the solemn duties of christianity, and the right improvement of time.

(2) Let the thoughtless sinner well consider the consequence of continuing to neglect the great concerns of his soul. How ready will such be another day to curse the vanities which led them to ruin and perdition. Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.

SINNERS INVITED TO CHRIST.

Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.—Isaiah lv. 3.

The great concern of a faithful minister ought to be, to save himself and them that hear him. It is enough to attend upon the word, and listen to the preacher; we must hearken to the Lord, speaking by him; and so hear, that our souls may live.

In the text we are presented with an invitation that demands our most serious regard. Our Lord himself, in the course of his ministry, dealt much in the language of invitation, and laboured to win souls by the most kind and tender promises. Mat. xi. 29. John vi. 37. vii. 37. And here the divine Father is inviting us to seek him, and to hearken to his voice. The words of the text are full of pity and compassion, and of tender mercy.

I. Explain the different parts of the invitation.

1. It here supposed that sinners are in a dying or *perishing condition;* and therefore they are invited to hear, that they may "live." The death to which we are exposed is not merely corporeal, but spiritual and eternal; and the death of the soul, the second death, is not the extinction of being, but an eternal separation from God. 2 Thess. i. 9.

2. It is implied, that *a way to eternal life* for perishing sinners is opened and proclaimed to us in the word of God; or we should not be called upon to hear and live. Life and immortality are brought to light especially by the gospel, which is eminently a revelation of mercy. Christ is the way to God, we have life only through his name, and there is no other way in which we can be saved. John xiv. 7. Acts iv. 12.

3. "Inclining the ear to hear," is something more than paying mere external attention to the word; it includes as much as *believing and obeying* the gospel. It is opposed to inattention, and aversion to the truth, such as the Jews of old discovered towards the ministry of the prophets, and that of our Lord himself. Jer. xvii. 23. John viii. 43.

4. The promise of "an everlasting covenant," is as much as *engaging to be our God,* and that we should be his people. The very proposal of making a covenant, is always the token of friendship and alliance. It was thus with Isaac and Abimelech, with Jacob and Laban. Gen. xxvi. 28. xxxi. 34. An "everlasting" covenant is one that shall never be broken. Oh what a promise is this!

5. The kind of covenant which God will make with those who hearken to his word, and obey his voice, *is compared with that made with David.* The promises contained in it shall be the same; and like that, it shall be "ordered in all things and sure.' 2 Sam. vii. 12—17. David understood this covenant as extending in succession to the Messiah, and this it was that caused him so much joy. Hence also the Messiah is called David's Son, and David's Lord: for he was the son of promise, and the final heir to the throne. The blessings of the kingdom of Christ, who should proceed from the loins of David, included all his salvation, and all his desire. This covenant likewise insured the resurrection of Christ, for its blessings are to be "everlasting:" he must therefore rise from the dead, and reign for ever. Acts xiii. 34. These spiritual and eternal blessings are promised to those who incline their ear, and hearken to the voice of God.

II. Attend to the motives by which the invitation is enforced.

1. In order to feel the importance of the subject, let us well consider *the nature of that destruction* to which the sinners are exposed, for without this we shall never prize the salvation of the gospel.
Particularly consider *the truth* of the matter, or the reality of our danger. You know that you are accountable beings, and have violated God's law: and what saith the Scriptures upon this subject? Hearken to the threatenings: 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the law to do them. He shall come to take vengeance

on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The wicked shall be turned into hell with all the nations that forget God. Their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. He that believeth not, the wrath of God abideth on him. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' These awful denunciations ought to sink deep into every heart. Consider also how dreadful it is to be *separated from God*, and from all hope for ever; to lie under his curse, to have no part in Christ, no inheritance with his people, but to be appointed to final destruction, as examples to the universe, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Can thine heart endure, or can thy hands be strong, in the day that the Lord shall deal with thee? Ezek. xxii. 14.

Consider *the justice* of the sinner's doom. You may not be willing to admit this at present; but in the last day every mouth will be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God. All will be convinced of the equity of the proceedings, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness. Remember however, that at present the gospel calls you to *the foot of mercy*. You are now invited to hearken, that your souls may live; and God is ready to enter into a covenant of life and peace.

2. Consider *the inestimable worth of the blessing to which you are invited*. They are such as will afford solid satisfaction, and fill the soul with everlasting joy. Not so the enjoyments of the present world, nor the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season, ver. 2. The promise includes the forgiveness of sin, a state of peace and friendship with God and of fellowship with his people. You will have an interest in his perfections and purposes, and all things shall work together for your good. He will be with you in death, and when flesh and heart fail, God will be the strength of your heart, and your portion for ever. At judgment he will free you from all condemnation, and no one shall be able to lay any thing to your charge.

3. Consider *the freeness of the invitation*. Christ by his death has opened a way to return to God, and this is the ground of the invitation. The fallen angels are not invited; and it is all of grace that for us a Mediator is provided, and the hope of mercy set before us. The feast is prepared and you are invited freely to partake, without money and without price. If you refuse to hearken, you must perish in your sins, and die eternally.

4. Think of *the peculiar advantages* which you enjoy. You have means of grace in abundance, line upon line, and precept upon precept; to be lost amidst such advantages, will unspeakably aggravate the doom. Matt. xi. 23. Incline your ear therefore and come, if you are willing to relinquish every self-righteous claim, and to give up all for Christ. Nothing hinders but your own reluctance, yet you must either come to him or perish.

THE LABOUR AND REWARD OF CHRISTIAN LOVE.

For God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed towards his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.—Hebrews vi. 10.

The defection of many of the Hebrews from the faith of the gospel, induced the apostle to warn them of the danger of apostacy, ver. 1—8. But while he thus speaks, he hopes better things of the generality of them, and things which accompany salvation. Great gifts and illumination may exist without charity or love, but it is the latter only that makes us real christians, and has the promise of eternal life. 1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2. It is not merely our "working" and "labouring" in God's cause, but doing it all for "love." The world is full of motion, and so is the church; but that only which is done from a regard to the name of the Lord is accepted of him.

I. Notice the description given of christian love.

It is not a mere affection of the mind, but an active operative principle, directing and pervading the life and conduct—

1. Its supreme object is *the name of the Lord*, which it seeks to glorify. God has made himself known to us as our Creator; this therefore is a part of his name, and the heavens declare its glory. But in the gospel especially he is revealed as our Redeemer, and his glory is seen in the face of Jesus Christ, so as it was never beheld under any other manifestation whatever. Love to the divine character enters into the very *essence of true religion*. If we conceive of God only as full of goodness towards us, and as having a special regard to our interests, we may be much affected by it, and think we love him; yet this may be no more than what Israel felt at the Red Sea, when they sung his praise, but soon forgot his works. Truly to love God is to love him as the holy, the just, the good. Hence so much is made of "the name of the Lord" in the psalms of David, where it is so constantly and so highly celebrated, in every varied form of speech. 'How excellent is thy name in all the earth: Not unto us, but unto thy name be glory: Come magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together: Let them that love thy name say continually, the Lord be magnified: and blessed be his glorious name for ever and ever.' Love to the name of the Lord will feel attached to it, *whenever it is impressed.* It is inscribed on his holy law, on his glorious gospel, on his worship, on his people: these therefore will be objects of supreme affection. The promotion of his cause in the world, is a principal means of exalting and glorifying the name of the Lord: this therefore will attract the heart of a true believer, and cause him to feel a deep and lasting interest in it.

2. The way in which christian love shows itself is, *in ministering to the saints.* Wherever love exists it will manifest itself in some way or other, it is a fire that will break out. We have seen the love

that God had towards us in the gift of his Son, and the love of God our Saviour towards man has also appeared, and our love must likewise be made manifest. But how can we express our love to God? We may praise and adore him, but we cannot benefit him; yet as love delights in communicating itself to its object, we may give him our hearts, and consecrate our all to his service. God also has appointed his "saints" to be the receivers of our bounty, and he takes what is done to them as done to himself. Hence in "ministering" to them, the believing Hebrews are said to have "showed their love towards his name." At that early period also many of the saints were poor, and therefore needed the compassion of their brethren; some of them were persecuted and oppressed, and others visited and ministered unto them. Many of them were devoted to missionary labours, and went forth to evangelise the nations; others who did not preach, accompanied and assisted those who did; while the rest manifested their love by helping them on their way, and contributing to their support. 3 John 6—8.

3. The *constancy of this love;* they not only ministered to the saints, but continued still to minister. Many have felt a love to God and to his cause for a time, and for a time have been warm in their friendship towards his people; but their zeal and ardour have afterwards died away. There was a time when they seemed willing to be or to do any thing, if they could but serve the Lord Christ; yet by and bye they become lukewarm and indifferent, and ultimately turn their backs upon the cause of God. Gal. iv. 15. But it is a supreme and abiding affection that God regards, and this only has the promise of salvation. Matt. x. 22. Heb. iii. 14.

4. The *energy of its operations:* it was a love that excited both to "work," and to "labour." The latter term implies more than the former, denoting the pains and toils in which love is ready to engage for the accomplishment of its object. There are some who appear to be very well affected towards the cause of Christ, but are unwilling to do any thing towards its support; they think they love Christ, and hope to be saved by him. But let them beware of being deceived, and that they love not in word only, but in deed and in truth. 1 John iii. 18. James ii. 16, 17. Genuine love will work and labour for God, without thinking much of it. It will keep his commandments, and not esteem them to be grievous. 1 John v. 3. The love of Christ will induce us to labour in the word and doctrine, in season and out of season, with all diligence and good fidelity; or if not engaged in the ministry, it will render us desirous of assisting by every means in our power those who are. Our secular transactions and callings in life will also form a part of this labour of love, if attended to with a view to the glory of God, that we may have whereof to give to his cause, and become subservient to its advancement.

II. The encouragement given to the exercise of this love: "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love."

Men often forget all the kindness we have shown them, and all our labour to serve them; and with the basest ingratitude return us evil for

good. But God will not be unmindful of his servants, nor of their feeblest efforts to promote his glory. He may seem indeed to forget, by withholding his blessing, but in truth he will not; the work of faith and the labour of love shall not go unrewarded.

When it is said that God is not "unrighteous" to forget, it does not mean that he is under any necessary obligation to regard our services, or that salvation either is or can be of works: yet it supposes that his *righteousness* is some way concerned, that those who labour for him in love should not labour in vain. It is also a righteous thing with God to recompense his troubled and persecuted people with a state of eternal rest. 2 Thess. i. 6, 7.

The truth is, that God regards *the mediation of his Son*, and loves to honour it by rewarding all our services for his sake. It is through him that we are accepted, and that all we do is accepted: hence only it becomes rewardable. To us it is a reward of grace; but being bestowed for Christ's sake, it is grace manifested in a way of righteousness.

God also remembers his *promises*, and his righteousness is engaged for the performance of them. He hath prepared for them that love him, what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man. In particular he has promised, (1) That what is done for him shall turn to our account *at the last day*, and that even a cup of cold water shall not lose its reward. (2) The Lord has promised that all our labours for him shall turn to some good account, *even in this world.* His servants shall not labour in vain; they that sow in tears shall reap in joy, and the good they endeavour to impart to others shall return into their own bosom.

Compare then the condition of the servants of God with that of the servants of sin, and their wages with the wages of iniquity. Rom. vi. 22, 23.

Let us also see to it that our love be an active and operative principle, and that all we do in religion be from affection to the name of the Lord, and a disinterested concern for his glory.

NEARNESS OF THE WAY OF SALVATION.

Hearken unto me, ye stout hearted, that are far from righteousness. I bring near my righteousness: it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry; and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory.—Isaiah xlvi. 12, 13.

The coming of Christ was so great an object in the esteem of the prophets, that they studied their own predictions of it, 'searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.' And when Isaiah comforted God's people, in the

prospect of their captivity, it was by exhibiting the promise of the Messiah: ch. xl. 1. Now, when expostulating with idolaters, he brings forward the same subject, and contrasts God's righteousness with their unrighteousness.

I. Enquire into the import of the word "righteousness," as used in this connection.

It does not mean a divine attribute, properly so called, for that would be a consuming fire. It is rather what belongs to God's "salvation," and his faithfulness in the fulfilment of the promise, in reference to the coming of Christ.

When the term is applied to the righteouness which is of the law, it relates to our justification; and had we been innocent, our innocence would have been our righteousness, and God would have accepted and blessed us on that account. Rom. x. 5. Deut. vi. 25. But we are not so, and therefore require to be justified by the righteousness of another, or we could not be justified at all. Rom. iii. 20. As this righteousness is that of another, and not our own righteousness, it can become ours only by imputation, or being placed to our account; hence it is that we are justified by faith, and not by the works of the law. Acts xiii. 39.

This is the righteousness so often alluded to in the Old Testament, as the righteousness of the God of our salvation. Psal. xxiv. 5. Isai. xlv. 21—25. Jer. xxiii. 6. Dan. ix. 24. This also is the righteousness so much insisted on in the New Testament, as that for which a sinner is accepted of God, and on which Paul exclusively relied for his justification. Rom. iii. 21—26. v. 19. Phil. iii. 8.

If it be asked, why 'faith' is said to be 'counted for righteousness;' the answer is, that faith is not reckoned on account of any intrinsic excellence which it possesses, for if it were, our justification would still be by works; but on account of the relation it bears to its object; that is, we are justified for his sake in whom we believe. In the same sense, faith is said to have made men whole, because the virtue, though derived from Christ, came through believing. Mark v. 34. Luke xviii. 42.

The obedience of Christ is that which every believer pleads in his approaches to God, and it is that which God has an immediate respect to, in the bestowment of all spiritual blessings. Ephes. i. 3, 4.

II. In what respects may it be said that God "brings near his righteousness."

It may refer to the nearness of the time in which it should actually be wrought out. The following things may also be noticed on this subject—

1. This righteousness was wrought out *before our eyes*, or under the immediate notice of mankind, in the life and character of the incarnate Saviour. The audible witness of the Father at our Lord's baptism, was designed to draw attention to the subject. It was for this end that the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us. If an angel had undertaken to fulfil the law for us, he might have been invisible; or if the

Son of God had not been really incarnate, we might have seen nothing of the transaction. But he was in the world, and though the world knew him not, yet some beheld his glory, and all testified of his immaculate purity and righteousness.

2. It is also *proclaimed in our hearing*, by the preaching of the gospel. It was first brought near to the Jews, by the beginning of the gospel at Jerusalem; and afterwards this righteousness was fully set before the gentiles, as God's method of justifying the ungodly. Luke xxiv. 47. Rom. iii. 25, 26.

3. It is especially *presented for our acceptance*, in the invitations of the gospel, and is in effect the substance of the apostolic ministry. 2 Cor. v. 19—21. The setting forth of Christ's righteousness, as the means of our justification with God, is the hand divine stretched out to save a sinking world.

4. God's righteousness is brought near, in that it is every where *placed within the reach of faith*. Whatever be the nation, the character, or the condition of the sinner, it is near at hand. No circuitous methods are required, it meets all the wants of the sinner at once; it is only to look and live, to believe and be saved. It was a commendation of God's law, that those to whom it was delivered might know and understand it as clearly, as if they had gone to heaven for instruction. Deut. xxx. 11—14. The apostle uses the same language in reference to the gospel, that it is too clear and decisive not to be understood. Rom. x. 6—9. Man's ways are circuitous for the justification of a sinner; he proposes a train of virtuous actions, which may issue in virtuous habits, together with a farrago of penances, pilgrimages, and good works. But God's way is near at hand: its language is, Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world: Whosoever call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. In whatever condition the sinner may be placed, if in exile like Jonah, and far from the means of grace, he may look towards the holy temple, and find mercy with the Lord.

III. For what purpose is this declaration made to the "stout-hearted," and such as are "far from righteousness."

This description of a hardened and careless state of mind, not only includes the openly profane, but all unbelievers, and self-righteous characters. To them the alarm is given, as to persons on the very brink of destruction; and they are invited to "hearken" to the voice of God.

1. It might be hoped that *love and mercy* would melt those who were not deterred by judgments. Think then, you that are taking the kingdom of darkness by violence, think of what Christ has done and suffered; and what a message God is now sending to you!

2. If the exhibition of so much mercy do not melt our hearts, the impenitent and unbelieving shall be made to know that the kingdom of heaven is indeed come *near unto them*. Luke x. 11. You have heard of the loving-kindness of God our Saviour, and seen the effects of the gospel in some around you; take heed then, and beware that you do not reject it, lest your bands be made strong, and ye be left to wonder and perish. Isai. xxviii. 22. Acts xiii. 41. 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

(1) Near as God has brought his salvation to us, it is not within the reach of an unbelieving heart. Nothing but faith can give us an interest in it, and without this we must inevitably perish. John iii. 18.

(2) From the doctrine of the text it evidently appears, that all who are saved, are saved by grace only. They have no righteousness of their own to glory in, but must be wholly indebted to the righteousness of another. 1 Cor. i. 30, 31.

THE CHRISTIAN'S TRIUMPH OVER THE ILLS OF LIFE.

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.— James i. 2.

The Jewish converts to whom this epistle was addressed, were exposed to a great variety of sufferings and trials; and though our outward circumstances may differ materially from theirs, the same comfort and advice given to them, may with equal propriety be applied to us.

I. Consider how believers are in danger of falling into divers temptations.

The word "temptation" generally means, whatever has a tendency to lead us into evil, to allure and draw aside our hearts from God. But in the text it denotes any kind of trial, or whatever is grievous, and difficult to be borne. Temptations of the former description try our purity, the latter our patience, and both of them our love to God.

"Divers temptations" include various sorts of trial, all of which tend to put our virtue to the test. Thus 'God did tempt Abraham,' or tried and proved him, by the various ills which befel him in life.

Let us notice then some of those temptations or trials, by which God may intend to prove and to try our hearts towards him.

1. *Poverty and affliction* are among the evils of the present life. At first conversion we are ready to think, if God would but give us an interest in his salvation, we should be ready to endure any kind of affliction for his sake. He will therefore try our love towards him, by suffering such things to befal us. If afflictions be threatening and severe, they try our hope, as the approach of the enemy tries the courage of the soldier. If long continued, they try our hope less, and our patience more.

2. The *loss of friends and earthly comforts*, is another means by which God tries the hearts of his people. It is not so great a trial to be destitute of certain comforts, as to be deprived of them after we have enjoyed them. It was thus that God tried Abraham, in requiring him to sacrifice the son whom he loved; and Job, in taking away all his children and friends, all his worldly substance, and bringing him to the very dust, after he had known better days, and possessed all that heart could wish.

3. *Worldly prosperity* furnishes a temptation, from which few men have escaped with honour. Nothing tries character more, or affords a stronger proof of the deceitfulness and depravity of the human heart. How many, when they had much less of the world than now, used to think what good they would do, if they had it in their power. But when God has tried the sincerity of their love, by giving them the opportunity of serving his righteous cause, and the general interests of benevolence, what has been the result?

4. *Persecution and reproach* for Christ's sake, were a great temptation in the early ages of the church, and by this the faith of multitudes was severely tried. This was the fan in Christ's hand, by which he cleansed his floor; and though the fury of the storm has ceased, there is enough remaining to put our faith and patience to the test.

5. The prevalence of *pernicious principles* is another great temptation, permitted for the trial of our love to Christ. Those false doctrines which strike at the character and government of God, the deity and atonement of Christ, the freeness and riches of his grace, will serve to prove whether we be of God, or have received the spirit which is of the world.

6. *Divisions and dissensions* among professing christians, are often permitted to try our love to Christ and his cause. At such times it is too often seen how little of this principle exists, and how ready some are to go back again to the world, when occasions of this kind present themselves. But true religion bears a very different character. Paul and Barnabas could not labour together, but each continued in his own sphere to serve the Lord Christ.

These are some of the temptations by which the Lord tries and proves the hearts of his people. Oftentimes also by affording them the opportunity of gratifying their *evil propensities*, their covetousness or revenge, their worldly or sensual inclinations. Here it is that our self-denial and love are tried.

By "falling" into these temptations is not meant our falling into *sin*, but falling into trouble, or into such circumstances as tend to try the reality, as well as the degree of our religion.

II. Consider how these things afford matter of joy, and of holy triumph.

It had been much if we had only been required to rejoice, notwithstanding the various trials of life; but it is far more that we are encouraged to rejoice in them, and on that very account, especially as it is the design of God to afflict us, by bringing us into such circumstances. 1. Pet. i. 6. Nor are we to "count it all joy" when we meet only with one or two trials, but when a host come against us, and we "fall into divers temptations."

It is allowed indeed, that times of trouble and distress call us to mourning and humiliation, but even then our sorrow must be mixed with joy. In one view the trials of life call for mourning, and in another they furnish matter for joy and exultation.

1. Because they afford *an opportunity of proving our love to Christ*

and his cause, and of gaining the greatest victory and triumph. By contentment in poverty, by patience in suffering, by submission under losses, by firmness in persecution, by unshaken attachment to the truth amidst the aboundings of error, by self-denial and giving up our own interest and inclination, we give the fullest evidence of our love to Christ, and are made to possess the deepest sense of it in our own hearts. It was on this account that primitive christians enjoyed so much spiritual comfort, and possessed such a degree of confidence, as to the reality of their own religion.

2. *The effects produced by all our present trials*, furnish another source of joy and triumph, ver. 3. They tend to promote the exercise of patience, and patience experience, and experience hope. Rom. v. 3. It is by trials and temptations that we become better acquainted with ourselves, are made to know more of God, more of Christ and his salvation, and to know these things more experimentally. Indeed we should have no proper knowledge of these subjects without them.

3. The fruit they will yield to us *in the world to come*. Here they tend to wean us from the world, and make us long for heaven, and will render heaven the sweeter to us at last. Oh then, with what pleasure will the weary pilgrim find himself at home and at rest. With what joy will the tried and tempted soul retire at last from the scene of all his conflicts and of all his woes! The recollection of all the pains and fears, of all the temptations and sorrows, endured in the present life, will swell the triumph and the joy.

REFLECTIONS.

(1) Of what importance then is it to possess a principle of genuine religion, to have our hearts right in the sight of God. Otherwise the trials of life will only tend to prove our hypocrisy, and sink us deeper into condemnation.

(2) We hence learn also the great advantages of true religion, by what it is able to do for us. It can convert the ills of life into real good, and turn all our sorrows into solid and everlasting joy.

DEATH AND JUDGMENT.

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment; so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation.—Hebrews ix. 27, 28.

The appointment of death, and of a future judgment, may be understood in two senses. It is the sentence of the Lawgiver, prior to all consideration of the mediation of Christ; and it is also the irreversible decree of heaven, notwithstanding that mediation.

In the former sense it is the penal effect of sin, or the doom passed upon apostate man. It is the sentence of God's law against a rebel world; and considered as such, it is reversible, as is the entire curse and condemnation of the law. In the latter sense it is an irrevocable decree, which subjects us to corruption, and to an appearance before God in judgment. In this view the righteous and the wicked are alike under it, notwithstanding the sacrifice and mediation of Christ.

It is in the first sense that the text is to be understood, for it is not what actually takes place on all mankind, but that from which we are delivered by the death of Christ, that is here intended. We are not delivered from death itself, nor are we exempt from an appearance at the future judgment; but believers are delivered from the penal effects of death, by the mediation of Christ.

I. Consider the awful doom here passed upon all mankind, and that is to die, and appear before God in judgment.

We may conceive in some measure what death and judgment would have been to us all, by considering what it actually is to those who *die in their sins*. Think what death must have been to the inhabitants of the old world, to Sodom and Gomorrah, to Korah and his company, to Saul, to Belshazzer, and Judas. This for substance is the doom which lies upon the human race.

There are two circumstances in particular, which render the death of those who die in their sins so very awful—

1. That it is attended with *the loss of all things*. Their portion being wholly in this world, their all is gone at death, and gone for ever. There is a total extinction of good: all natural enjoyments, and all sinful ones, are for ever fled, even though wickedness itself will be inherent throughout the whole of their existence.

2. They die *under a load of guilt*, that sinks them lower than the grave. If ye die in your sins, said our Lord, whither I go ye cannot come. Under the law the sins of men were transferred as it were to the sacrifice, on which the offerer laid his hand; and if our sins be not transferred to Christ, that Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, they must lie upon our head when we come to die. How unspeakably awful to die in such a state, and to appear before God in judgment with all our guilt unpardoned!

But this is not all: the awful doom passed upon mankind exposes us to *a judgment to come*.

Death is not a going out of existence, it is the passage only to an unseen and eternal world. We are accountable creatures, and must give account of all that is done in the body, unless we obtain forgiveness through the blood of Christ. Thus it must have been to all, but for the mediation of Christ, and will be so to us, unless we be found in him.

Three things in particular tend to infuse a solemn dread, respecting the judgment of the great day—

1. It is a judgment that *takes cognizance of the heart*. All imposition will be at an end; no hypocrisy, no disguise can screen us, for God is judge himself.

2. The *character of the Judge*, is another alarming thought. One that is omniscient, almighty, and alwise; against whose infinite authority every sin has been committed, and at whose presence the heavens shall pass away.

3. The *importance of the decision*. It will be final and irreversible, from which there is no appeal. Such will be the case of sinners, on whom the sentence of the law is executed; and must have been the case with all mankind, but for the mediation of Christ.

II. The relief provided by the gospel, against this tremendous sentence, ver. 28. "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin unto salvation."

Having become the substitute of all that believe in him, by bearing their sins in his own body on the tree; he will become their substitute in the last day, not by exempting them from death and judgment, but by delivering them from the curse and wrath of God.

1. It is through Christ's dying for us, that *we are delivered from the sting of death*. The sting of death is sin, which Christ hath removed, by being made a curse for us. As the sacrifice bore away the sins of the people under the law, so the sacrifice of Christ has taken away the sins of those who believe in him. Death therefore now becomes a blessing to them, instead of a curse; and is hence called a 'sleeping in Jesus, a departure, and a putting off the earthly tabernacle.' Hence also christians have triumphed over death, in its most terrific forms. Death was originally under the power of Satan; it now becomes the servant of Christ, and of his people; for to him belong the keys of hell and death.

2. It will be through his appearance in our favour at the last day, that *judgment will be divested of its terrors*. The condemning sentence of the Lawgiver will by him be reversed, and he will appear as the Advocate to plead our cause.

(1) On his first appearance he came to *bear our sins:* now he will come "without sin." The sacrifice once offered for the sins of many, will for ever perfect them that are sanctified, and there will be no need of any more sacrifice. The ends of justice are fully answered; and having died for sin once, he dieth no more.

(2) To complete *the salvation of his people*, will be one great object of his second coming. He will redeem their bodies from the grave, will raise them incorruptible, and deliver both body and soul from condemnation. The challenge will then be given, 'Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?'

(3) All this is to those, and those only, who *look for his appearing*. 2 Tim. iv. 8. No others will have any part in him, for he shall at the same time come to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thess. i. 8.

As Christ is the only refuge at death, and in the day of judgment, how important is it that we flee to him before the summons comes.

EFFECTS OF THE GOSPEL ON OPPOSITE CHARACTERS.

He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away.—Luke i. 53.

This is part of the song of Mary, on her first interview with Elizabeth, and which is distinguished by some of the loftiest strains of sacred poetry, ver. 46—53. The holy Virgin enlarges on a principle which is seen in the general administration of providence, and which was now carried into effect by the birth of Christ. God had thereby 'put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.' This principle also which characterized the birth of Christ, is exemplified in many of God's proceedings. It is especially his design with respect to Christ, to exalt the lowly, and to abase the proud; to fill the hungry, and to send the rich empty away. Thus indeed it was foretold, that every valley should be exalted, and every mountain and hill be made low. Isai. xl. 4.

I. Consider the opposite characters referred to in the text.

1. The "hungry" being contrasted with the "rich," determines it to mean the same as *poor and needy*, or destitute; and this is the character which God delights to bless, to comfort and revive. Isai. lvii. 15.

2. The terms are properly descriptive of *worldly circumstances;* and it was true of Mary and her family, that they were poor people. It is also generally true, that Christ's coming was a blessing to the poor; the great men of the earth were none the better for it, but were sent empty away. Jam. ii. 5. Yet this is not the full meaning of the words, for there are many unbelieving poor, and some among the rich that are called. 1 Cor. i. 26.

3. When the terms are used spiritually, they denote the *real condition* of men, or what they are in the sight of God. In this case the terms are reversed: sinners are poor and wretched, and believers are rich in faith and hope. Rev. iii. 17.

4. They express what men are *in their own esteem*, as emptied of self, and become poor and needy, hungry and destitute; while those who are full of their own sufficiency, are rich in their own eyes, and need nothing. The former are sick, and require to be healed; the latter are whole, and need no physician. The former are destitute of wisdom, righteousness, and strength; and go to God as empty, that they may be filled. The others also go to God, but it is in the spirit of the Pharisee, and not that of the publican. Luke xviii. 11.

II. The different treatment they receive in their approaches to God: the one are "filled with good things," and the other are "sent empty away."

It is supposed that they both attend the Lord's house, and come to

the gospel feast; but the one is filled, and the other is sent away with nothing.

1. We may see this exemplified *in regard to prayer.* But few who attend the gospel are free from a spirit of self-sufficiency, and many of this description join in the duty of prayer: but see the difference. The convictions of the penitent have emptied him of all his self-sufficiency: he once thought of mending his ways, and commending himself to God, but a view of the spirituality of the law has annihilated all his hopes at once. He had hoped at least by amendment and by duties, to do something for the better; instead of which he grew worse. All his resolutions and strivings have only sunk him deeper in the mire; he feels that he has no hope, no help in himself; and now, none but the Lord can save him. His language is, 'Lord help me: God be merciful to me a sinner.' This then is the time of love; and when he has nothing to pay, the Lord forgives him all. Now the good news of the gospel is truly welcome; salvation by grace, and for Christ's sake, is all he desires. In Christ he finds enough to supply all his wants, and he goes away from the mercy seat full of hope, and joy, and peace. But here is another, who though he has felt much, and tried to do something, and often failed, yet still hopes for the blessing of God on his good endeavours. Some of his vows have been broken, but he will renew them; temptations have prevailed against him, but he will take more care in future. The bricks are fallen down, but he will build with hewn stone. Isai. ix. 10. But this man is still a Pharisee, and God will send him empty away. There is nothing in the gospel for him, nothing that suits his taste. Mercy is provided for the guilty and the miserable, help is provided for the helpless, and a Saviour for the lost: but he is rich and full, and feels his need of nothing.

2. *In reading the Scriptures*, we shall also see the truth of the text exemplified. One reads the word of God that he may understand and obey, that he may find the good way and walk therein. Jer. vi. 16. He does so, and finds rest to his soul. Another comes to read or hear the word, full of his own wisdom, it may be to find fault, and gets confirmed in his prejudice and unbelief. Prov. xiv. 6. He reads, but finds nothing, and is sent empty away. Matt. xiii. 14.

3. Both these opposite characters attend upon *public ordinances*, but in a very different way, and for different purposes. Here the poor and needy comes hungering for the bread of life; he comes to be fed, and is filled with good things. The gospel is food for his soul, and so coming he finds what he wants; some text is explained, some promise is applied, that is peculiarly applicable to his circumstances. Another, full of himself, comes to public worship, but overlooks the good; he dwells upon the manner, and forgets the matter; the least impropriety of speech or attitude spoils his opportunity, and he is sent empty away.

4. In appearing before *the last tribunal*, the very same principle will be exemplified. Believers will appear in the spirit of meekness and lowliness, desiring to be found in Christ; and when they come to die, they think of nothing but him. They shall accordingly be found in him, and shall receive at his hands the gift of eternal life.

The others come with vain expectations, pleading their good deeds, and forgetting their defects. 'Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and did not feed thee? In thy name we have done many wonderful works.' But his answer will be, Depart from me: I never knew you!

(1) All true religion begins with the knowledge of ourselves, and being emptied of our own sufficiency; and there is no coming to a saving acquaintance with Christ in any other way.

(2) Yet it is not this, nor any thing in us, that warrants our coming to Christ. Invitations are addressed to sinners as such, irrespective of any qualification; but without a spirit of lowliness and self-abasement, we shall never come, and the invitations will be addressed to us in vain.

SOURCES OF HOPE IN THE DAY OF TROUBLE.

Oh Lord, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit.—Jeremiah xvi. 19.

This whole chapter is full of grief and sorrow, and full of woes and threatenings against Jerusalem. The prophet describes the calamities that were coming upon the nation, together with their causes, and then concludes with the prayer in the text, ver. 10—19.

I. Attend to a few explanatory remarks.

1. *The day of affliction* here means the day of Jerusalem's destruction by the Chaldeans, and this was to Jeremiah a day of sore calamity. He loved his country, but most of all the city of God; and in the prospect of its destruction he felt as Moses did, when he pleaded for Israel saying, 'And what wilt thou do unto thy great name?' This is the true spirit of religion, manifesting itself in a supreme concern for God's righteous cause, and feeling a tender interest in the welfare of those who are unconcerned about themselves. Thus Christ felt for Jerusalem, and Paul for his unbelieving countrymen.

2. The day of affliction, whether public or private, *led the prophet to earnest prayer;* and he pours out his soul before God as "his strength, his fortress, and his refuge." These are all military terms, and well adapted to the exigencies which the prophet had in view. "Strength" is necessary to fit us for warfare, a "fortress" to flee to when defeated by the enemy, and a "refuge" when driven away like the Benjamites into the rock Rimmon. God is a refuge when all other helps fail: happy those who flee to him to hide themselves in times of trouble. Psal. xxvii. 5.

3. Viewing his own country as going to ruin and desolation, the pro-

phet mentions *the conversion of the gentiles*, as affording him relief and comfort in the day of his calamity. (1) Because the conversion of the gentiles would tend to keep alive *the interests of religion*, and God's cause shall not sink, come what will. If it declines in one place, it shall revive in another; and if the Jews cease to serve him, he will have a people from among the gentiles. Rom. ix. 26. (2) He mentions the calling of the gentiles as *a reproof to his own nation*, and to provoke them to jealousy, as Paul did in his day. Rom. x. 19. xi. 11—14. The Jews in Jeremiah's time were going off to that very idolatry of which the gentiles themselves should shortly be ashamed, and say, "Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit." The ignorant and unenlightened gentiles shall become wiser than Israel, with all their high advantages. Rom. ix. 30, 31.

II. Improve the subject, and apply it to ourselves.

1. In seasons of discouragement the servants of God should be *much in prayer*. Those who are so will find him to be their strength, their fortress, and their refuge, a very present help in every time of need. Psal. lxii. 6—8.

2. In such seasons we may take comfort in *the hope of better times*, and in the prospect of the glorious things spoken of the city of God. Thus our Lord comforted himself, Isai. xlix. 5, 6: and thus also he comforted his disciples. John xvi. 7—10.

3. The prophecy in the text *has been accomplished* in a good degree already, and will be abundantly more so in the latter day. Gentiles have indeed come to the Saviour, and have turned from idols, to serve the living and true God. Have we also done the same, and cordially embraced the gospel?

4. In the example of Jeremiah we see that the pious Jews were concerned *for our salvation*, and longed and prayed for it: how much does it become us therefore to be concerned for the conversion of the Jews, that all Israel may be saved. Psal. lxvii.

5. It is no dishonour we see to abandon *the religion of our forefathers*, when it is found to be unprofitable and vain. The gentiles were to do this, and we also must be delivered from every species of religion that is founded merely in tradition. 1 Pet. i. 18.

6. When we hear of the conversion of the heathen, it becomes us to *tremble for ourselves*, lest it should portend our downfal. It was so alternately both with Jews and gentiles, and may be so with us and other nations. Rom. xi. 20.

7. We here learn what is *the true way of salvation*, and that is, coming to Christ, or coming to God through him. This is the commencement of all true religion, and thus it is described, both in the Old and New Testament. Isai. xlv. 24. John xii. 32.

8. The coming of the gentiles to Christ, from the ends of the earth, will establish *universal peace*, harmony and love, and all nations shall be blessed in him, and shall call him blessed.

CHARACTER AND PORTION OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought out for them that trust in thee before the sons of men.—Psalm xxxi. 19.

The goodness of God is a delightful theme, and forms the principal glory of the divine character. Great as he is in majesty, power, and dominion, he rather chooses to be known as the God of love, and of all grace; for mercy is his chief delight. The common goodness of God extends to all, for his tender mercies are over all his works: but there is a special goodness, which is enjoyed only by his people, and of this the text speaks.

I. Consider the objects of the special goodness and mercy of God.

They are such as "fear him, and trust in him before the sons of men." The union of these two principles is what constitutes the christian character.

1. They are *such as fear God*. This is a general term by which his people are described in the old testament; it implies a reverence for his holy name, and an unreserved obedience to his will. They fear him not with the terrors of a slave, but with the feelings of a child, who trembles at his father's frown, not that he may flee from him, but fall submissive at his feet. Saul feared and fled, and so did Cain; but David feared, and prostrated himself in the dust.

2. They are said to *trust in him*, as well as fear him. The true fear of God cherishes no suspicion or unbelief, it inspires confidence and hope, and joy. Believing and trusting, being connected with the fear of God, prevents both presumption and despair. Hereby real believers also are distinguished from pharisees, whose religion is all fear, and whose services result from the mere dread of future misery. They would neither serve God, nor do any thing to please him, but for this, or the hope of being well rewarded. In the same way real christians are distinguished from self-confident antinomians, whose religion is nothing but unfounded assurance, and an arrogant assumption of the promises, unaccompanied with the fear of God.

3. The characters referred to in the text are such as fear God, and trust in him, *before the sons of men*. Their religion is open and ingenuous, as well as ardent and sincere. "The sons of men" neither trust in God nor fear him, but despise those who do; while such as love God will do both, and do it openly. This tends to honour God, and therefore God will honour them. It tends likewise to reprove the world, and they are his witnesses against it. The Scriptures deem it of importance that his friends should be seen and known as such, and have promised that they shall be openly acknowledged in the last day.

II. Observe what God has laid up and wrought out for them that fear him, and trust in him before the sons of men.

1. It is a goodness *answerable to the trust reposed.* The Lord will not deceive the hopes of them that love him and confide in him; he has promised every thing to faith, and he will give it.

2. It is goodness *laid up and wrought out.* It is laid up in the divine purposes, and wrought out in a way of providence; it is laid up as an inheritance reserved, and wrought out for us as we need it: it is laid up to be enjoyed hereafter, and part of it expended to make us meet for the final possession.

3. *The magnitude of this portion is unspeakable:* "oh how great is his goodness!" (1) The circumstances under which we are viewed, tend to enhance the mercy. We are lost, ruined, and undone: how great is that goodness which could provide for the pardon of all our sins, for the moral renovation of our nature, and perfecting the work of grace with a crown of glory. (2) The fulness of the provision which God has made for his people, affords a still greater display of his mercy. It is what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. (3) The safe hands in which all is deposited. God himself has laid up, and he himself will give the inheritance. (4) The sovereign freedom with which it is dispensed, without money and without price, yet in a manner corresponding with infinite wisdom. (5) The seasonableness of the distribution. The greater part of the portion is still to come, yet in every time of need a present supply is given, sufficient to carry us to our journey's end, and to give us a foretaste and an earnest of the future inheritance.

CHRIST THE OBJECT OF SUPREME DESIRE.

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him.—Philippians iii. 7—9.

This is the language of Paul while a prisoner at Rome. Those who live at ease do not know so well how to realize the importance of religion and the blessings of salvation, but this was a situation in which a person would feel himself in earnest; and though this ambassador was himself in bonds, he rejoices in the success and enlargement of the gospel: ch. i. 12—14. He had already made many sacrifices for the cause of Christ, and he is prepared to make many more, even to the giving up of life itself.

I. Contemplate the object of Paul's desire.

The sum of all is Christ; to know him, to win him, to be found in him: and this, if we are christians, will be all our salvation, and all our desire.

1. *The knowledge of Christ* is a principal object of desire. Knowledge here includes faith in him, which has the promise of eternal life; it is not a simple apprehension of the truth, but a receiving of the truth in love. John xvii. 3. To this knowledge the apostle ascribes an "excellency," in comparison of all his former acquirements; and its excellency is derived from the object itself. Whatever relates to Christ's coming into the world, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, his intercession, and second coming; whatever relates to his person, his work, his offices, and qualifications; all possess an incomparable excellency, and awaken the deepest interest in the heart of every true believer. These are subjects on which angels delight to dwell, and so did Paul, from the day that he had first discovered them.

2. His object was to *win Christ.* All believers are running a race, and pressing towards the mark; and Christ is the prize of this high calling, the substance and the essence of eternal life. The covenant made with David, had Christ for its principle object; and this was all his salvation, and all his desire. If we have him we have life, and all things freely for his sake: this is heaven and nothing short of it.

3. Paul's desire was to be *found in him.* Here he looks forward to the end of the world, and the last judgement. Christ is the ark, the city of refuge; and the object desired is, to be found in him. He is the bridegroom; and to be united to him is to be interested in his righteousness, and in all the blessings of his salvation. This is the way of acceptance with God, to the utter exclusion of every other, ver. 9.

II. The sacrifices which the apostle made for the sake of these interesting and important objects.

He had already relinquished much for Christ's sake, but he did not consider that relinquishment as a procuring cause, or as entitling him to the blessings of salvation; nor did he reckon that these blessings were to be given as a compensation for his sacrifices, or his sufferings. What he had given up he now considers as dross and "dung," something to be cast away, in order to make room for what is far better. In general they were things pertaining to the "flesh" ver. 4; things that had been "gain" to him, ver. 7, or what he had highly esteemed; but now they are cheerfully relinquished, in the hope of a better portion.

More particularly—

1. *All his mental acquirements* are esteemed as nothing, less than nothing, and vanity; he no longer serves himself by them, or makes them the object of his glorying. He had been educated at the feet of Gamaliel, was possessed of great mental resources, and had once valued himself on this account; but now it is all nothing, in comparison of the knowledge of Christ. If any of his acquirements were sanctified to his service, and devoted to his glory, well and good; but for any other purpose he desired not to possess them.

2. He had given up *all his earthly prospects*, that he might win Christ. No doubt he stood fair for promotion, and might have realised much worldly gain and reputation. His talents and education fitted him for the highest offices both in church and state, while his zeal and

ardour furnished the highest commendation: but he lets it all go for Christ, thinks of nothing but winning the immortal prize, and finding his all in him.

3. He had relinquished *all his religious advantages and attainments,* as well as his secular interests and prospects, ver. 4—6. These were such while a pharisee, that he had no doubt of being justified by his own good works, for he excelled most of his own nation in the Jewish religion. They were once counted great "gain" to him; but are now considered as belonging to the flesh, and no better than loss and dung, ver. 7, 8. These were things too, for which his countrymen had sacrificed even Christ himself; and it is for these that men are still sacrificing their own souls, giving up the gospel and eternal life for the sake of worldly gain and reputation. But Paul relinquished all these for a religion that would expose him to hunger and thirst, to nakedness and peril, to weariness and painfulness, and at last to an ignominious death. He was willing to give up all his old religion, all his high attainments, to stand on a level with the chief of sinners, and be wholly indebted to Christ for his salvation. These are hard things in the eyes of the world, but the love of Christ constrained him to such a sacrifice. Such also was the choice that Moses made; and though we may not be called to edure similar sufferings and privations, yet we must be prepared to relinquish whatever stands in competition with Christ, and to endure all things for his sake.

III. Observe the cheerfulness with which the apostle makes these sacrifices.

From the first day that he believed in Jesus he gave up all as lost, like one who had been dealing in a bad commodity. All his acquirements and worldly prospects, together with the time and labour bestowed upon them, are now considered as utterly vain and futile. Some indeed might imagine that he acted rashly, under first impressions, and would afterwards repent, as others have done, and grown weary in their christian course. But not so Paul, who takes care to assure us that this was not his case. He says not only, "I *have* suffered the loss of all things, but I *do* count them but dung that I may win Christ." And lest this should not be sufficient, he adds, "Yea, doubtless;" that he was still of the same mind as he had been at first, and had no reason to alter the choice which he had made. All this too was spoken while he was in prison, and in the prospect of martyrdom. Oh what a recommendation is this of the blessed Saviour, that eight and thirty years of reproach and suffering for his sake had not abated, but inflamed his love towards him.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) From hence we learn *the way to heaven.* It is to know Christ, to choose him, to believe in him for acceptance with God, and to be willing to part with all things for his sake.

(2) We are here presented with *the model of a christian minister,*

whose theme and whose glory must be the cross of Christ. If faithful also in the work of the Lord, he will look for no other reward than that which Paul expected, and that is, to win Christ and be found in him.

(3) It is *union with Christ here*, that prepares us for glory hereafter, and which will more than counterbalance all our present losses and sufferings for his sake. Rom. viii. 18.

THE UNION OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC INTEREST IN THE SERVICE OF GOD.

From above the horse gate repaired the priests, every one over against his house. After them repaired Zadok the son of Immer, over against his house. After him repaired also Shemaiah, the son of Shechaniah, the keeper of the east gate. After him repaired Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, another piece. After him repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah, over against his chamber.—Nehemiah iii. 28—30.

It is interesting to observe the zeal and diligence of the returned captives, in building the walls of Jerusalem. The city and temple had been rebuilt above sixty years before, but the walls of the city were broken down, and the people were under great affliction and reproach: ch. ii. 17. Nehemiah, when informed of these circumstances, fasts and prays; and obtains a commission from the king to go and rebuild the city walls. He meets with many difficulties, and with much opposition from the enemies of Israel; but the people had a mind to work, and he soon began and finished the undertaking. In this he discovered, not only his patriotism, but a spirit of piety and devotedness to the service of God; for it was God's city, and the place of his sanctuary.

This chapter informs us who were the builders, and their names are left on record as a memorial to all generations.

(1) Observe how the work was *divided among them*, and how by every man's attending to his proper share, the whole was presently completed. Great things may be done by unity, and by every one's taking his part; this promotes emulation, and is highly serviceable to a good cause.

(2) Though each had a separate part of the work assigned him, yet there was *no separate interest*. Some repair in one place, and some in another, but it was all to construct one wall, and that to defend the city, by which they might all live in peace and serve the Lord.

(3) Things were so ordered that each man, and body of men, might have their work allotted them as nearly as possible, *over against their dwellings*. This was combining together, private and public good in the service of God, and this is what should be aimed at in all cases.

We are required to cultivate largeness of heart, and to keep in view the glory of God and the general good, in all our undertakings; yet

those things which most nearly concern us, are to be the special object of our care and charge, and in properly attending to this, we shall most effectually promote the other. Each of the Jewish captives was required to have the good of Jerusalem at heart, and not to be merely concerned about himself, or his own convenience; yet by building the wall "over against his own house, or over against his chamber," he combined private convenience with public good, and discharged his peculiar trust, while seeking the welfare of his fellow citizens.

The principle exhibited in the passage before us is, *the union of private and public interest in the service of God;* and this we may see exemplified in those things which more immediately concern ourselves.

I. The first object to which our attention must be directed is the welfare of our own souls.

Whatever else we do, if we neglect this, it will come to nothing. Probably you have read and heard much about the gospel, of the conversion of sinners, and of some of your own connections: but what is the state of the wall "against your own house?" Are you really born again, and have you repented and believed the gospel? Supposing you are a true believer, what is the state of your own soul? Do you love to read and pray, and serve the Lord; are these your daily exercise and delight? In watching over the interests of others we are greatly in danger of neglecting our own vineyard. If properly attentive to our own souls, we shall at the same time glorify God, and contribute to the general good. Spirituality is necessary to usefulness, without it we can do nothing; and the more spiritual we are the more good we are capable of doing. Let us build up the wall against our own house, and we shall thereby promote the interest of Christ in the world.

II. The next object that requires attention is the spiritual welfare of our families.

The care of those more immediately committed to our charge, is a duty of very high importance. The work of changing the heart does not belong to us, but the means do, and we are solemnly required to instruct and admonish those who are about us. Godly parents will travail in birth for their children, until Christ be formed in them.
If God should bless our labours in this respect, and the walls of Jerusalem be built up, it will be for the general good. Families are nurseries for the church of God; let us therefore labour to bring them to the knowledge of the truth, and we shall thereby contribute to the public interests of religion.

III. Another important object is the spiritual improvement of our religious connections.

It becomes us to seek the good of Christ's kingdom at large, and to pray for all that love the Saviour in sincerity; but this is consistent

with a more immediate attention to our particular connections. There are duties which we owe to our christian brethren, duties which ministers owe to the people, and the people to them; but what ever promotes the immediate good of our connections, tends also to promote the general interests of Christ's kingdom. This therefore is building the wall over against our own house, for the city of our God, and the place of his sanctuary.

IV. Another object of regard is the good of our neighbours and acquaintances around us.

If every one were attentive to the spiritual welfare of those within his reach, how soon would the wall be built up. In visiting the sick, instructing the ignorant, praying for and comforting the afflicted, inviting them to hear the gospel, leading them to the house of God, and performing towards them all the offices of kindness and civility, much good might be effected, and much done towards the enlargement of Christ's kingdom. There is a station which providence has assigned us; to fill this up with the work of faith, and the labour of love, is to build up the wall over against our own house, and so to contribute our share of usefulness.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) Learn from hence the importance of *every one's doing something* to promote the cause of Christ. It is the combination of efforts properly directed, that generally ensures success.

(2) Let us not be so concerned about ourselves, as to neglect *the good of others*. Some were active in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, who had neither "house" nor "chamber" in the city. These were the men of Jericho, ver. 2; the Tekoites, ver. 5, 27; and the men of Meremoth, ver. 4, 21. These, who had no private interest to seek were glad to contribute to the public good, and have left an example worthy of imitation.

(3) He that *does nothing* for the cause of Christ, shows that he has no interest in it, and shall derive no good from it. He is an empty vine that bringeth forth fruit unto himself.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUE BELIEVERS.

This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, oh Jacob.—Psalm xxiv. 6.

Jewish worship was less pure and spiritual than gospel worship, yet even then, true and false worshippers were distinguished. Some indeed have supposed that the Sinai covenant required only external obedience,

and had nothing to do with the heart; but this is a mistake, for every law of God must necessarily require the heart, and nothing short of it. The text before us, by giving a description of the true citizens of Zion, is a proof of this, ver. 3—6.

I. Explain the terms in the text.

1. By the term *generation* is generally meant all the people of one age, or particular period of time, who happen to be cotemporary together. But here it means a specific class of persons, distinct from the generality, and who are known by their moral qualities. Solomon has given a similar classification, Prov. xxx. 11—14, and we see the same characters existing at the present day. These are seeking after riches, fame, and worldly honour. There is also a generation of God's children, whose distinguishing character it is that they seek his face. Psal. lxxiii. 15. iv. 6.

2. By *the face* of God is meant his favour, which is granted to them that seek him. When Absalom was exiled from David's court, and dwelt at Geshur, he was not permitted to see 'the king's face,' a pleasure enjoyed only by his friends and favourites.

3. Those who truly seek the Lord, seek him as *the God of Jacob*, as a covenant God, who at that time especially had adopted the posterity of Jacob, and taken them into intimate relation to himself. If we also seek him aright, we must seek him as a God in covenant, not so much in covenant with Jacob, as with Him to whom all promises belong. God has now revealed himself as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in thus seeking we shall find him.

II. Consider what is included in seeking the Lord.

It is something more than an attendance on the means of grace, where God has promised his presence; it includes the exercise of the heart. More particularly,

1. Seeking the Lord supposes *a deep and mournful sense of distance from him.* Sin has made a breach between God and us, so that he withdraws his presence, and hides his face in anger. Since the fall of man, God no longer holds fellowship with him; we have lost his favour and friendship, and those who seek him must be brought to know and lament it. Hence it is that real believers are not at home in the world, they have not that constant nearness to the Lord which they desire, and the whole of the present life becomes a seeking state. There are seasons more especially when such as love God are under the hidings of his face, labouring under guilt and darkness; and when this is the case they cry out with Job, Oh that I knew where I might find him! Taking up the resolution of Jonah, they say, I will look again towards thy holy temple. It is a mercy however, if under all our troubles we can find no rest but in the Lord, and until we seek his face and find him.

2. It implies *an utter dissatisfaction with every earthly good.* All are in the pursuit of happiness; some seek it in honour, in riches, and

worldly ease; but those who seek the Lord, find that happiness is nowhere but in him. Worldly riches and prosperity afford no contentment, nor the best of friends in the day of adversity; neither can they be satisfied with an attendance on the means of grace, if the presence of God is not with them. When Saul was in trouble, he sought for the charms of music to drive away his grief. In sickness, Ahaz sought relief only from his physicians; others seek it in company, or in worldly pursuits. But whether in prosperity or adversity, the christian seeks his happiness alone in God.

3. It includes *the use of all appointed means.* Many seek the Lord, but not in the appointed way; they are seeking him in a way of self-righteousness, and in dependence on their own doings; but such shall never find him. Jesus only is the way, the truth, and the life; and no man cometh unto the Father but by him. Such as truly seek him, do it in the exercise of faith. God has promised to meet with his people, and to commune with them, but it must be from off the mercy seat.

4. Such as truly seek the Lord *seek him perseveringly and with their whole heart.* They do not always find, on their first seeking, but go on to seek till they find him whom their souls love. Some have been discouraged, and have turned back, but it will not be so with those who seek the Lord in earnest. They will seek as for hidden treasure, will spare no pains, and take no denial. Like Mary at the sepulchre, they will continue looking and waiting till the Lord appears. In the enjoyment of his presence they are contented in any situation, but without it a palace could not make them happy, nor even heaven itself.

III. Observe with what this is connected, as the evidence of our seeking the Lord aright.

This is the generation of them that seek him, even of such as have "clean hands and a pure heart, who have not lifted up their soul to vanity, nor sworn deceitfully," ver. 4.

1. It may be considered as *matter of fact*, that true religion will invariably be accompanied with purity and integrity, and that these things are inseparably connected. Such as love and seek the Lord are the only characters that are truly upright. There may be some professing religion, who nevertheless lift up their soul to vanity, and set their affections upon the world; but their profession is utterly vain and delusive. There are also pretenders to virtue and morality; but where shall we find the man of pure heart? No where but among the friends of God. Go and search for them in the world, amongst infidels and mere nominal christians; and you will not find them.

2. It is a fact that may *easily be accounted for.* No other principle will bear this fruit, but that of true religion. Many motives may operate a partial morality, but purity of heart is the effect only of renewing grace. True religion begins in the love of God, but it will lead to the keeping of his commandments, and to the love of our neighbor; and this it is that secures the practice of universal righteousness.

(1) Are we then such as are among the people of God? On what

object is our heart set, and what would make us truly happy? Whither do we go in times of trial; and what end have we in view in our attendance upon religious ordinances?

(2) If we be such as seek the Lord, sooner or later we shall find; and let us remember, that those shall not be ashamed who wait for him.

THE PRICE OF HUMAN REDEMPTION.

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?—Romans viii. 32.

The gift and sacrifice of Christ form a subject at all times interesting; it is the believer's feast, and the sinner's hope. Here it is mentioned as an important fact, and a most important inference is derived from it. It is an argument from the greater to the less, and the gift of all things is considered as nothing in comparison to the gift of Christ.

I. Observe the amazing fact: "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all."

Several important particulars are comprised in it—

1. It supposes *the condition of sinners* to be most deplorable, else such a sacrifice would not have been requisite. Had sin been a small evil, or could any other sacrifice have sufficed for its expiation, God would assuredly have spared his own Son, and the cup would have passed from him; but this was found to be impossible. Matt. xxvi. 38, 39. Heb. x. 4.

2. *The sacrifice itself* is supposed to be of infinite worth, being the sacrifice of God's own Son, and the shedding of his most precious blood. To "deliver him up," was the greatest of all gifts, and of all sacrifices. Men usually "spare" what is most dear to them till the last extremity; a ship in a storm will be abandoned, with all its valuable cargo, if human life can thereby be spared. Here it is supposed that the gift of Christ is the most transcendent instance of the love of God towards us. It was great to bear with us, amidst our trespasses and sins greater still to pardon and justify us greater still to glorify such sinful creatures, ver. 30. But greater than all these is the gift of his only begotten Son: here the love of God is unspeakable, and passes knowledge. All this however supposes the true and proper divinity of Christ, and the language of the text could not be justified on any other principle.

3. This gift is expressive of *God's great displeasure against sin.* Not to "spare," but to "deliver up," are terms usually applied to the punishment of the most wicked and atrocious of mankind. Deut. xxix. 20. In this way an idolator among the people of Israel was to be punished: 'thine eye shall not pity him, neither shalt thou

spare him.' Deut. xiii. 8, 9. So Christ was not spared, but delivered up into the hands of justice to suffer and die, and to be made a curse for us. 2 Cor. v. 21. Gal. iii. 13.

4. It displays *wonderful compassion to sinners*, and the great account that God makes of our salvation. It is not usual to make great sacrifices for little things, much less would it be compatible with infinite wisdom. When God would save the people of Israel, he gave Egypt for their ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for their life. Isai. xliii. 3, 4. But when a world is to be saved from endless ruin, he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all.

II. The inference drawn from this interesting truth: "How shall he not with him also freely give us all things."

1. Observe the *medium* through which all things come to us: they are given "with him," or in connection with the gift of Christ. This takes the precedence of all other gifts in the order of time, as well as in magnitude; and our reception of Christ also takes precedence of the reception of all other spiritual gifts It is like the marriage union; by becoming one with him, we are interested in all that he possesses. Hence the importance of believing in him, for he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. All things are given us for his sake, in reward of his obedience, and not for our believing.

2. The *fulness* of the grant: "all things." He gave us the gospel, and also his Holy Spirit, which is comprehensive of all spiritual blessings. He gives grace and glory, an interest in all things present, and in all to come. Rom. viii. 28. 1 Cor. iii. 21—23

3. The *freeness* of it: he will "freely give us all things." This expression conveys two ideas: (1) That he gives all things *without any desert* on our part, for we were 'enemies' and 'ungodly,' when he delivered up his Son for our salvation. Rom. v. 6—10. This also is the model of all his other gifts; they are all freely bestowed through him, and not for our sakes. He saves us and calls us, he justifies and glorifies us, but it is all of grace. 2 Tim. i. 9. (2) That he gives all freely and *plenteously*, or with a liberal hand. Psal. lxxxvi. 5. cxxx. 7. All who receive Christ receive also abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness; and nothing is too great, after the bestowment of such a gift. Rom. v. 17—20.

DELIGHT IN PUBLIC WORSHIP.

But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy; and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple.—Psalm v. 7.

The worship of God has in all ages been the delightful employment of his people. Here they have found themselves at home and at rest, while the world around them is full of trouble. During the former dispensation the worship of God consisted much in outward pomp and ceremony; now it is more spiritual; but under all its shapes and forms, it has been the delight of the godly in all ages.

I. Notice David's resolution to keep close to the worship of God: "As for me, I will come into thy house."

1. This language shows *that he was regardless of the example of others,* and would not suffer himself to be influenced by it. It is supposed that the wicked, of whom he had been speaking, neglected the worship of God, as is usually the case, and that from various motives. Some neglected it from *pride,* as many do now, thinking it beneath them to pay any serious attention to religion. Psal. x. 4. But David, though a king, thought it no dishonour to be a worshipper, and even a door-keeper in the house of God. Some through *indolence* and carelessness are found to disregard the ordinances of public worship, treating them as a matter of indifference in which they have no concern. But David wanted no excuse for absence: his soul longed and even fainted for the courts of the Lord. Wicked men in general are guilty of this neglect, from an *aversion* to the purity and righteousness of God, and the spirituality of his worship. They could bear the worship of an idol, or the formalities imposed by superstition, but not the exercises of true devotion, in which the presence of God is fully realised. But David loved to be there, because he could see his power and glory in the sanctuary.

2. Observe *the wisdom of David's resolution.* He had found his account in it, and could say from experience, It is good for me to draw near to God. Indeed we are not aware how much we owe to public worship; it is like the sun, which if withdrawn, the loss would soon be felt, and we should sink into heathen darkness. The christian graces are all quickened and kept alive by it, and its influence is felt even by the wicked, in restraining and regulating many parts of their conduct.

II. The spirit in which David desired to go up to the house of the Lord—"in the multitude of thy mercy, and in thy fear will I worship."

In connection with a holy fear of the majesty of God, he would cherish a humble dependence on his mercy. The union of these sentiments, the

opposite of presumption and despair, is essential to all acceptable worship.

1. In our approaches to God we must *depend on the multitude of his mercies*, and can come in no other way. We are sinners, and must never forget it; we must not come like the pharisee to the temple, but as the publican, crying, God be merciful to me a sinner. We contract fresh guilt every day of our lives; our griefs and sorrows call for mercy, as well as our sins; and when we come before the Lord it is that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. Nothing can support us in the day of trouble, but the mercy of God our Saviour. It is also encouraging to consider, that with the Lord there is a "multitude" of mercies; mercy of every kind, and suited to every occasion, a fullness that is inexhaustible.

2. In all our approaches to God we must also cherish *a holy fear of his majesty*. It becomes us to beware of unhallowed freedom, and every thing bordering upon presumption. The familiarity which he admits must be attended with reverence and godly fear. Eccles. v. 1, 2. Heb. xii. 28.

3. In every act of worship *both these feelings require to be united*, and then every thing will be kept in its proper place. Hope and joy, unaccompanied with fear, would rise into presumption; fear, without hope and joy, would sink us into despair. It would also engender hard thoughts of God, and a spirit of unbelief.

III. The manner in which David would make his approaches to the Lord—looking "towards the holy temple."

The pious psalmist was much engaged in private devotion, as well as public worship; and it is to the former that he here refers, as preparatory to the latter. There was no "temple" in David's time, but there was a sanctuary, in which stood the altar and the mercy seat. To this the psalmist looked when at a distance from it; when the temple was built the eyes of the faithful were directed towards it; and when the temple was destroyed they prayed, looking towards Jerusalem. Jonah ii. 4. Dan. vi. 10.

1. It was in the temple or sanctuary that *God had recorded his name*, and there it was he dwelt between the cherubims. Psal. lxxx. 1. To look towards the temple therefore was looking towards the Lord God of Israel.

2. There it was that the Lord had promised to *meet with his people*, and to commune with them from off the mercy seat. That was the propitiatory, and there they might have continual access to God. With an eye to this therefore they must worship, and pray before him.

This teaches us the way of acceptance with God, that no one can come to him but by the Mediator. Without shedding of blood there is no remission, and without faith in the atoning sacrifice there is no approach.

If the courts of the Lord be now so delightful, what will they be above. Here he is our sun and shield, but there our everlasting light and glory; and those who worship him in spirit and in truth on earth, shall be introduced to his temple above.

CHRISTIAN STEDFASTNESS.

For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.—1 Thessalonians iii. 8.

The Thessalonians were a very amiable people, though but lately converted from the grossest idolatry, and made greater attainments in the divine life than many who had much longer enjoyed a course of religious instruction. Their conversion afforded the apostle great joy, and he hoped they would be his crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus: ch. ii. 19, 20. Yet considering them still in the body, and subject to great persecutions, he feels much tender solicitude on their account, and sends Timothy to comfort them: ch. iii. 1—5. The evangelist having brought good tidings, which cheered the heart of Paul, he breaks out in the language of the text.

I. Enquire what is implied in our "standing fast in the Lord."

In general it supposes that we are "in the Lord," and of one heart with him: that we are made one with him by faith, are joined to the Lord by one spirit, are accepted in the beloved, and have made him our refuge from the wrath to come.

"Standing fast" in the Lord is a military term, like that in 1 Cor. xvi. 13. The Lord's people are here compared to an army, liable to attack, and standing firm against the enemy. The object of Satan is to divide and scatter them, in order to accomplish their defeat.

The weapons which he prepares for this purpose are such as the following—

1. *Persecutions for Christ's sake.* This is the sword that he employed in the early ages of christianity, when such multitudes were martyred by pagan Rome; and though we are not now exposed to any legal persecution, we must nevertheless expect to meet with something similar; and to stand fast in the evil day is the great object of the true believer. The Thessalonians did this, and are highly commended for it: ch. i. 6. ii. 14.

2. *The temptations of the World* are another mode of attack, which require to be steadfastly resisted. The ranks have too often been broken by this means, and many have been carried away by the allurements of the world, after having endured a great fight of afflictions; they could bear the frowns of the world, but not its smiles. Many individuals have been ruined by a conformity to the present world, and congregations have been melted down into one common mass.

3. The great enemy sometimes makes use of *internal divisions and dissensions* among christians, in order to weaken and defeat them. He knows that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, and in this way many have fallen and been overcome. They have taken offence, for some reason or another, have then deserted their ranks, and left the cause of God to shift for itself. But if we "stand fast in the

Lord," we shall abide by his cause and interest, in adversity as well as in prosperity, and shall think none the worse of Christ for any of the troubles we may meet with for his sake.

More particularly: this stedfastness includes what the apostle mentions in ver. 6; namely, faith, charity, and a good remembrance of our christian brethren.

(1) We stand fast in the Lord when we preserve *a proper attachment to evangelical truth*, and there is no standing fast without this. On a high ascent, a little deviation from the centre would be dangerous. Truth is a narrow way, and we often see one going off on one side, and one on another. In the apostle's time many fell into judaism and self-righteousness, others into heathen philosophy, and were corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. Col. ii. 8. Our danger lies either in self-righteous pride, or in presumption; and while opposing the one, there is great danger of being carried away into the other. Some who have been the advocates for what they call practical religion, have given up those important principles on which alone it can be founded; while others in becoming the advocates of free grace, have fallen into antinomian presumption. We cannot stand fast in the faith but by keeping close to bible truth, and living upon it.

(2) We may be said to stand fast in the Lord when we *abound in charity or love*. Tidings were brought of the fervent charity of these Thessalonians, which was no doubt expressed in words and deeds, and this caused abundant joy. It is not enough to be sound in the faith, we must also abound in love; for a man may have an orthodox creed, while his heart is cold and dead. There is the work of faith and the labour of love to be performed, and where religion is genuine it will be active. Christ's army must consist wholly of effective men.

(3) When we have *a good remembrance of Christ's servants*, we may be said to stand fast in the Lord; especially if we remember them at a throne of grace, whether they be present or absent from us. Indifference to the truth begets indifference to the brethren; but if we stand fast in the Lord, we shall love them for the truth sake that dwelleth in them.

II. Consider the influence which this stedfastness among the people has on the happiness and prosperity of Christ's ministers. "Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord."

If indeed the minister be a mere hireling, who seeks not you but yours, he will not be much concerned about stedfast adherence to the truth; but if he be the Lord's servant, it will be the life of his soul. It is a fact, that it made Paul and his companions alive, even in the midst of afflictions and persecutions; and it will have the same effect on every other faithful minister.

1. It will influence *his manner of preaching*. The effect of a people on the mind of a minister, according to their spirituality, is very considerable, and it is impossible that it should be otherwise. If late in their attendance upon the word, if heavy and inattentive, it cannot fail to paralyse his efforts; or if wavering in their attachment to the great

truths of the gospel, and uninterested in them, he will scarcely be able to preach at all. But if constant, early and attentive, if affectionate and spiritual, it will be the life of his soul, and he will be able emphatically to adopt the language of the text.

2. It will influence *the matter* as well as the manner *of his preaching*. If the faith and charity of the people abound, if stedfast and immoveable in their adherence to the truth, if zealously affected always in a good cause, if the excellence and importance of divine things be deeply felt, if unawed or unallured by the frowns or smiles of the world; it will enable a faithful minister to assert and maintain the importance and holy influence of divine truth, without any fear of being contradicted; saying, Ye are our epistle, known and read of all men.

3. It will materially influence *the success of his ministry*. Under God, the success of the gospel depends very much on the effectual co-operation of ministers and people. Knowing one another, stirring one another up to laborious exertions, and when every one is willing to take his proper place in active service, this is the way to live and prosper. This it is that draws the hearts of young converts, and awakens the attention of the careless. But if all be left to the single exertions of the minister, his heart will soon be discouraged, and the work will die in his hands.

REFLECTIONS.

(1) If the spirit and conduct of a people have such an influence on the mind and labours of a faithful minister, what must be his feelings in regard to those who turn back, and desert the cause of God.

(2) What also must his feelings be concerning those for whose salvation he has laboured in vain. Instead of being his joy and crown of rejoicing, in the day of the Lord Jesus, he will lose his reward, and have to give up his account with grief. Heb. xiii. 17. 2 John 8.

(3) Distressing as it may be to a minister that he has laboured in vain, it will be still more to those who are not profited by his labours. If he be faithful he shall receive the commendation of his Lord, although Israel be not gathered; his loss shall be made up to him, but that of the soul that perishes is irretrievable, and no compensation can be given. Matt. xvi. 26.

SALVATION IN CHRIST ALONE.

And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.—John vi. 35.

It was foretold of Christ that he should not judge after the sight of his eyes, nor after the hearing of his ears; and hence we see that his an-

swers were generally addressed to men's thoughts, rather than to what they said. Such was his answer to the unbelieving Jews, ver. 26. Proceeding to cavil, ver. 30, he suggests that there was better bread than that of which they boasted, ver. 32, 33; but being still ignorant of his meaning, ver. 34, he speaks to them plainly in the words of the text. Our Lord's assertion is in effect a practical improvement of the doctrine he had been teaching; that he was himself the true and living bread, and that those who live upon him shall never want.

I. Consider the character here described: "he that cometh to Christ —and he that believeth on him."

"Coming and believing" are here used as *convertible* terms, though there is some difference in certain connections. Coming is a figurative expression, believing is literal; but the former is more expressive of the outgoings of the heart than the latter, and therefore it is, probably, that we find this term in almost constant use in the writings of John, which are replete with heavenly affections.

Coming to Christ, strictly speaking, is the *effect* of believing. Heb. xi. 6. But whatever shades of difference there may be in some instances, both the terms have the same meaning in the text, and also in ver. 40.

Believing and coming to Christ for life, is that on which the Scriptures lay so much stress; and on this depends our eternal salvation, or condemnation. Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 36.

More particularly—

1. Believing in Christ is more than *traditional assent* to the truths of the gospel, which produces no fruit. It is more than a bare *conviction*, produced by the force of truth upon the conscience. Some were overcome by the miracles of Christ, and could no longer disbelieve; yet they possessed not that faith which accompanies salvation. John ii. 23—25. It is such a belief of the gospel as makes it appear to be what it really is, infinitely worthy of God, and full of grace and truth. It is such a reception of the Saviour as endears him to the heart; and with it there is an utter renunciation of all false schemes of religion, and of every other hope of salvation; so that Christ is all and in all.

2. Coming to Christ implies something more than a conviction of sin, or even an anxious *concern for salvation*. Many are burdened with a sense of guilt, and with fearful apprehensions of future misery, who never come to Christ with their burdens, though it is this alone that has the promise of rest and peace. Matt. xi. 28. It is more than *prayer;* it is prayer in the name of Jesus, and looking for mercy for his sake. Coming to Christ supposes a coming off from every other dependence, forsaking every other refuge, and coming to him as unworthy, weak and sinful, and undone. It is a coming to him for life, ver, 40, and for deliverance from the wrath to come. Heb. vi. 18. It is a state of mind in which we think but little of our mental exercises; our thoughts are taken up about Christ as our refuge, and about him alone.

II. The promise made to such: "he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."

Not that we shall be destitute of spiritual desires, and need no more in consequence of our coming to Christ: far otherwise. But as often as these desires and wants occur, there is enough in him to satisfy them all, and we shall be abundantly replenished from his fulness.

If we desire the forgiveness of sin, he hath promised abundantly to pardon. Isai. lv. 7. If we long for reconciliation with God, plenteous redemption is now provided. Psal. cxxx. 7. If we desire to be saved in a way of righteousness, God can now be just while he justifies the ungodly. Rom. iii. 26. All spiritual blessings are provided, and are given freely, according to the riches of his grace. Ephes. i. 3. 2 Tim. i. 9.

GOD THE PORTION AND GUIDE OF HIS PEOPLE.

For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.—Psalm xlviii. 14.

The great nations of antiquity were always boasting of their strength and glory, but Israel was taught to make their boast in the Lord. Moses did this in his dying song, and the Psalmist here renews the delightful theme. Deut. xxxiii. 26—29. Zion is congratulated on the eminence of her situation, and the strength of her fortifications, but chiefly because God was known in her palaces for a refuge, ver. 1—3. The glory of all is summed up in the text, as it is also in a similar manner in Psal. cxliv. 15.

Jehovah was the God of Israel, in a sense in which he is not the God of any other people; yet the text does not so much refer to their national capacity, as to a state that should endure for ever. It therefore applied only to those who were Israelites indeed, and is still applicable to all believers, under every dispensation of grace and mercy.

The people of God are here congratulated on the magnitude and extent of their privileges, which are summed up in four particulars; namely, the distinguishing character of their God, the relation he sustains towards them, the perpetuity of that relation, and his condescension in becoming their guide through life.

I. The character of God is matter of congratulation to them that love him.

Great stress is laid on the demonstrative pronoun "This"—*this* God is our God. Every nation had gods many, and lords many; but to us there is but one God, and he is the true and living God, in opposition to all others. The heathens worshipped as gods, the departed spirits of

their heroes and other celebrated men, many of whom were the patrons of iniquity; but our God is the Holy One of Israel, a God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is he. The heathen gods were often carried captive by their conquerors, and the prophet satirically remarks that they became a burden to the weary beast; while on the contrary, he whom Israel adores, carries and bears his people in the time of danger. Isai. xlvi. 1—4. Their gods have eyes but see not, ears but hear not; while the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ear is open to their cry. They called from morning till night, Oh Baal hear us; but there was none to answer. But, oh Thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come; and unto thee shall the vow be performed. The best of the heathen deities were virtuous magistrates and princes, who bore not the sword in vain. But oh, Who is like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, transgression and sin; who retaineth not thine anger for ever, because thou delightest in mercy. "This God" is the God we adore.

II. The relation he bears to his people is another ground of congratulation. This God "is our God."

This is covenant language, and supposes at least two things; namely, the Lord's giving himself to be our God, and our giving up ourselves to him, to be his people.

1. We may here observe, that *the former of these is truly wonderful.* It is great kindness to do such sinful creatures good, to send us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. But to give Himself and say, I am thy shield and exceeding great reward, is a most stupendous act of kindness and condescension. All this however supposes the mediation of Christ, through whom all spiritual blessings are communicated, and by whom God becomes our portion.

2. *The latter is indispensably necessary*, nor can the former exist without it. If the Lord be our God, it supposes that we are his people. This also is the effect of grace, adopting and making us his people, by a voluntary and unreserved surrender of ourselves to the Lord, and choosing him for our portion and inheritance.

III. The perpetuity of this relation and of this portion: it is "for ever and ever."

Canaan was a great portion to Israel, but they died as well as other men, and left it. We also possess many valuable blessings in this life, but they are all transitory. God gives us children, parents, friends; but they must all die. But to have God as our God for ever and ever, more than makes amends for all; and eternity itself is necessary in order to enjoy his all-sufficiency. Never shall we be able fully to comprehend the heights and depths of his infinite and boundless love.

IV. We are not only congratulated on God's having provided for us an eternal portion, but in his condescending to conduct us to the possession of it. "He will be our guide even unto death."

If the portion were ever so great, and we were not guided to the possession of it, we should be none the better of the grant. Israel not only needed the good land but an angel to conduct them through the wilderness.

1. The Lord *guides us by his counsel*, contained in his written word. The Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, and to furnish us unto every good word and work. Without the light of revelation, men walk in darkness, and know not whither they are going; but God becomes the guide of his people, in providing a light for their feet, and a lamp for their paths.

2. He guides us *by his merciful providence*. By ways that we knew not, and paths that we had not known, he brought us at first to hear the word, and to seek his face; and since then his powerful and invisible hand has been over us, and in some instances we may clearly trace it.

3. By *his preserving and renewing grace*, he has also guided us in the way of life. How often have we turned aside, and how fatally should we lose our way, were it not for the superintendence of his providence and grace. How often has he restored our souls when we have wandered, and led us in paths of righteousness for his name's sake; sometimes by the word, or by afflictions, by ordinances, and brotherly admonition.

4. Having loved us and led us thus far, he loves us to the end, and *will be our guide even unto death*. The fiery pillar attended the Israelitish camp, and directed all their movements, till they passed over Jordan. Nor will our guide ever leave or forsake us, till we have reached the end of our journey, and entered into the joy of our Lord.
All this too, is essential to our safety; we need guiding all the way through; and were we left to ourselves at any period of our pilgrimage, we should come short of that rest that remaineth for the people of God.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) This subject invites us to choose the Lord for our portion, saying with Ruth, Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.

(2) It teaches us to surrender up ourselves to the Lord, that he may lead us in the way that we should go, and bring us at last to a city of habitation.

(3) We learn the miserable state of the impenitent and unbelieving. They are in the world without a guide, and leave the world at last, without having any thing that they can carry away with them, in their hand.

MOTIVES TO CHRISTIAN DILIGENCE.

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest.—Ecclesiastes ix. 10.

This counsel comes with the greater force, from a man who himself had not been idle in his day, and much of whose zeal had been expended in building a house for God. It is true, that on reviewing many of his own labours, he saw much vanity attached to them; yet he did not mean by this to encourage despondency or inactivity, or he would not have used the urgent and impressive language of the text.

I. Illustrate and explain the exhortation.

Many things are said in Scripture, especially in the New Testament, which may seem to depreciate the works of men, yet true religion is far from being unfriendly to good works.

Properly to understand this language, three or four things require to be noticed—

1. Nothing must be done with a view of *superceding the work of Christ.* If we think to gain the favour of God, or the forgiveness of our sins, by any works or doings of our own, we deceive ourselves, and stumble at the stumbling-stone. Rom. ix. 32. x. 3.

2. Whatever is done *must be done in faith*, in order to its being acceptable to God. When it was asked, what shall we do that we may work the works of God; the answer was, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. John vi. 28, 29. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Heb. xi. 6.

3. Whatever is done *must accord with the revealed will of God*, or we cannot be his servants. Worldly men would take up the words of the text, and go into every kind of evil; power and not justice, being the only principle that gives law to their conduct. But we are not at liberty to do as we please, so long as there is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy.

4. In selecting the objects of our zeal and labour, we must have *a special regard to what providence places within our reach*, or "whatsoever our hands find to do." Many things may be within the reach of another, that come not within our sphere; and it is one of the vanities of human life to be always thinking of what we would do, if in other circumstances, while the good we might do is neglected or overlooked. Much depends on a proper selection of labour, according to the talents or opportunities we may enjoy. One may have wealth, and with that he may do much good. Another is poor, but he can pray, and give counsel. Another has wisdom or influence, and the liberal will devise liberal things. One can preach, and another can open a door for the gospel, in his town and neighborhood. One may contrive, and another execute. Moses and Aaron did well together, neither of them would

have done so well apart. Paul was a preacher, and left others to baptize, while he carried the gospel round about unto Illyricum. Let us consider also how much is left undone in the world, in the church, in the family, in the neighborhood where we dwell, and what labours our hands might find to do.

5. Having found what to do, *we are required to do it with all our might.* This includes at least two things. (1) That we do it *without delay.* Many things which our hands find to do at one time, may not be practicable at another; and therefore will not be done at all, if not done immediately. Opportunities are a call from God; they pass by, and return no more. (2) That we do it in *good earnest.* If we look into the history of the church, we shall find that all the great things which have been done, were done by men who were in real earnest, and who laboured with all their might. When God would redeem Israel, it was by one who was prepared to sacrifice a kingdom and a crown in his service, and who esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. And when he would bring his people into Canaan, it was by a man 'who followed the Lord fully,' and who nobly said, We are well able to go up and possess the land. Also when Jerusalem was to be rebuilt, it was by a man who put not off his clothes, and by a people who had a mind to work. And by whom was the gospel at first diffused throughout the earth? By men who counted not their lives dear unto them, that they might testify the gospel of the grace of God. By whom was the reformation undertaken in the sixteenth century? By such men as Luther, whose zeal and whose labours were indefatigable. By whom has the gospel been carried into foreign parts, and bibles distributed in all languages? By missionaries and by agents of a kindred spirit.

The motives by which the exhortation is enforced.

1. We are *hastening to the grave.* Every step we take, every hour we pass, we are going thither. Other things may be uncertain, as, whether we are going to heaven or hell: but this is certain, nor do we know how soon we may reach the end of our journey.

2. When we come thither, *all our activity for God or man is at an end:* "for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." There is no more to be done for the souls of men, nor for their temporal interest, nor for the cause of Christ in the world.

What a loud call then is this to *sinners.* Life is the only time to escape the wrath to come; this time is now in your hand, if you have but a heart to improve it. A door is now open, but by and bye it will be shut for ever. The throne of grace is now accessible, but ere long it will be converted into a judgement seat. Christ is the way of life and salvation, but the way will be of no use when we have arrived at the end of our course, and the scene of life is closed for ever.

It is also a loud call to *christians,* to redeem the time, and live wholly to the Lord. There is much to do, and the time is short; let us therefore labour with renewed diligence, and be as those who wait for their Lord.

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